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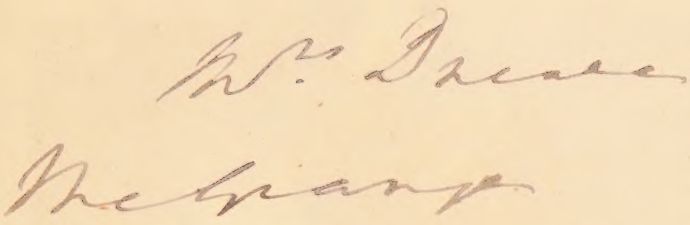

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DEAD-SEA FRUIT

A Novel

BY THE AUTHOR OF

"LADY AUDLEY'S SECRET,"

ETC., ETC., ETC.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. II.

FIFTH EDITION.

LONDON

WARD, LOCK, AND TYLER

[WARWICK HOUSE, PATERNOSTER ROW

1868.

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DEAD-SEA FRUIT.

CHAPTER I.

ALPHA AND OMEGA.

THERE were some days on which M. de Bergerac had no work for his secretary, and on such occasions the young man was free to dispose of himself as he pleased. These days Eustace Thorburn devoted partly to reading and meditation, partly to the delightful duty of ministering to Helen's caprices—if, indeed, the word "caprice" can fairly be used in relation to any one so entirely amiable as Mademoiselle de Bergerac.

Happily for the ambitious hopes of the student, there were some days on which Helen asked no service from her willing slave, and when the slave could find no excuse for intruding on the

privacy of his mistress as she read, or practised, or worked in her pretty drawing-room.

On these leisure days Eustace made good progress with his own studies. He cherished the ideas of the ancients as to the requirements of a poet, and thought that whatever was learnt by Virgil should be at least attempted by every student who would fain sacrifice at the shrine of the Muses. On dull days he was wont to spend the morning in his own room, working his hardest; but in fine weather he preferred a solitary ramble in the park, or on the banks of the river, with his own thoughts and a volume of classic prose or poetry for company.

He set out for a day's ramble, one fine, sharp morning in December, at the same hour in which a gentleman arrived at Windsor by the morning express from town.

This gentleman left his luggage and his servant at the station, and set out to walk from Windsor to Greenlands, as Eustace had done about four months before. He was a man of middle size and of middle age, with a slender

but muscular form, and a fair patrician face—a face with an aquiline nose and cold, bright-blue eyes that might have belonged to some Danish Viking, but a face in which the rugged grandeur of the old warrior-blood was tempered by the effeminacy of half a dozen generations of courtiers.

There was an inexpressible languor in the droop of the eyelids, an extreme hauteur in the carriage of the head. The mouth was perfect in its modelling, but the lips had the sensuous beauty of a Greek statue, too feminine in their soft harmonious line, and out of character with the rest of the face.

Such was Harold Jerningham, owner of Greenlands, in Berkshire, and of the bijou house in Park Lane. Fifty-two years of an existence that may be fairly termed exhaustive had left their impress upon him. There were traces of the crow's-foot at the corners of the clear, full blue eyes, and sharp lines across the fair, proud brow. The waving auburn hair was sprinkled ever so lightly with the first snow-flakes of life's

winter, and the auburn moustache and beard owed something of their tint to the care of an assiduous valet; but Mr. Jerningham was the kind of man who looks his handsomest at fifty years of age; and there were few faces in foreign Court or ball-room that won more notice than his on those rare occasions on which the *blasé* English traveller condescended to appear in public.

The lively Celts amongst whom Mr. Jerningham made a languid endeavour to get rid of his existence regarded that gentleman as a striking example of the English "spleen," and were prepared to hear at any moment that Sir Jerningham had made an unusually careful toilet that morning, and had then proceeded, with insular frigidity, to cut himself the throat *à la manière Anglaise*.

For the last seven or eight years the world had found no subject for scandal in the life of Harold Jerningham. It seemed as if those wild-oats which he had been sowing, more or less industriously, ever since he left the Uni-

versity must needs be at last exhausted, so quiet, and even studious, was the existence of the gentleman, who appeared now in London, anon in Vienna, to-day in Paris, next week in Norway; and who seemed always to support the burden of his being with the same heroic endurance, and to combine the cold creed of the Stoic with the agreeable practice of the Epicurean.

He had lived for himself alone, and had sinned for his own pleasure; and if his life within the last decade had been comparatively pure and harmless, it was because the bitter apples of the Dead Sea could tempt him no longer by their outward beauty. He was unutterably weary of the inner bitterness, and even the outward beauty had lost its charm. If he had ceased to be a sinner, it was that he was tired of sinning, rather than that he lamented his past offences.

A sudden fancy, engendered out of the very emptiness and weariness of his brain, had brought him to England, and the same fancy

brought him to Greenlands. He wanted to see the old, abandoned place, which had echoed with his childish laughter in the days when he could still be amused; the woods that had been peopled by his dreams, in the days when he had not yet lost the power to dream. He wanted to see these things; and, more than these things, he wanted to see the one friend whose society was pleasant, whose friendship was in some wise precious to him.

"I have rather gloried in outraging the prejudices of my fellow-men," he had said to himself sometimes, when anatomizing his own character, in that critical and meditative mood which was habitual to him; "but I believe I should scarcely like Theodore de Bergerac to think ill of me. It is not in me to play the hypocrite, and yet I fancy I have always contrived to keep the darker side of my nature hidden from him."

The master of Greenlands happened to be in an unusually reflective mood, and his reflections of to-day were tinged with a certain despond-

ency. This nineteenth of December was his birthday, the fifty-second anniversary of his first appearance upon the stage of life; and the reflections which the day brought with it were far from pleasant. For the first time in his existence Mr. Jerningham had this morning been struck by the notion that it was a dreary thing to eat a solitary breakfast on the anniversary of his birth, uncheered by the voice of kinsman or friend invoking blessings on his head. The luxurious little dining-room in Park Lane glowed in the ruddy fire-light, and glittered with all the chaste splendour of Mr. Jerningham's art-treasures, as he trifled with his tea and toast, far too tired of all the delicacies of this earth to care for the bloated livers of Strasbourg geese or the savoury flesh of Bayonne pigs. The room in which he had breakfasted, and the table that had been spread for him, formed a picture which a painter of still-life might have dreamed of; but it had seemed very blank and dismal to Harold Jerningham on this particular occasion, when an accidental

glance at the date of his *Times* reminded him that his fifty-second year had come to an end.

He resolved forthwith upon a visit to the only friend whose sincerity he believed in, and the only living creature from whose lips good wishes would seem other than a conventionality.

"I suppose it is because I am getting old that such gloomy fancies come into my head," he said to himself, as he walked from the station to Greenlands. "It never struck me before that a childless man's latter days must needs be blank and empty. Must it be so? Which is the lesser of the two evils—to be the father of an heir who languishes for his heritage, or to know that one's lands and houses must pass to a stranger, when the door of the last narrow dwelling has been sealed upon its silent inhabitant? Who knows? Is not existence at best a choice of evils—and the negative misery is always the lesser. Better to suffer the dull sense of loneliness than the sharp agony of ingratitude. Better to be Timon than Lear.

This is how the philosopher argued with himself on his fifty-third birthday, as he walked the lonely road between Windsor and Greenlands.

"Dear old Theodore!" he said to himself; "it is nine years since I have seen him—three or four since I have heard from him. God grant I may find him well—and happy!"

Mr. Jerningham had walked this road often in his boyhood and youth—very often in the days when he had been an Eton boy, and had boldly levanted from his tutor's house, and crossed that purely imaginary boundary, the Thames, for an afternoon's holiday at home, where the horses and dogs and servants seemed alike rejoiced by the presence of the young heir. He had walked the same road at many different periods of his existence, in every one of which his own pleasure had been the chief desire of his heart; not always to be achieved, at any cost, and rarely achieved with ultimate satisfaction to himself.

He had travelled this road in a barouche, one

bright summer afternoon, with his handsome young wife by his side, and the bells of three parish-churches ringing their joy-peal in honour of his coming. He remembered what a folly and a mockery the joy-bells had seemed; and how very little nearer and dearer his wife's beauty had been to him than the beauty of a picture seen and admired in one hour, to be forgotten in the next.

"I think I was once in love," he said to himself, when he meditated on the mistakes and follies of his past life. "Yes, I believe that I was once in love—fondly, foolishly, deeply in love. But it came to an end—too soon, perhaps. In his youth a man has so many dreams, and the newest always seems the brightest. Well, they are all over—dreams and follies; the end has come at last, and it is rather dreary. I suppose I have no right to complain. I have lived my life. There are men who seem in the very heyday of existence at fifty years of age; but those are not men who have taken life as I have taken it. It is the old story of the candle

burnt at both ends. The illumination is very grand, but the candle suffers."

Mr. Jerningham entered the park by that small gate through which Eustace Thorburn had passed six months before. Greenlands was very beautiful, even in this bleak winter weather, but there was a desolation and wildness in its aspect eminently calculated to foster melancholy thoughts. It was by the express wish of the master that the park had been permitted to assume this aspect of wildness and decay. "My good man," he had said to his bailiff, "I assure you all this trimness and primness, which you make so much fuss about, is to the last degree unnecessary, so far as I am concerned. I shall never again come here to live for any length of time; and when I do come, it pleases me best to come and go as a stranger. Let those poor old dawdling men in the grounds take matters as quietly as they like. You will pay them their wages on Saturday just the same as if they did wonders in the way of sweeping, and pruning, and clipping. I don't want Greenlands

to look like a Dutchman's garden; and I am glad to think that there is some kind of use in the world for poor dawdling old men who only excel in the art of not doing things."

The bailiff stared, but he obeyed his master, whose reputation for eccentricity had long been established at Greenlands.

In the chill wintry morning the desolation of the place was more than usually apparent, and Mr. Jerningham, being on this particular occasion inclined to contemplate every object on the darker side, was strongly impressed by the dreariness of the long avenue, where the bare, black branches of the elms swayed to and fro against the winter sky, and where the withered leaves drifted before him with every gust of biting winter wind.

It was in the avenue that had been the grand approach to the mansion in the days when the great world visited Greenlands, that Mr. Jerningham came upon a young man, sitting on the trunk of a fallen tree, reading. To see any one seated on so cold a morning was in itself a fact

for remark; but this hardy young student had the air of a man who takes his ease on a sofa in his own snug study, so absorbed was his manner, so comfortable his attitude. Approaching nearer, the *blasé* wanderer in many lands perceived that the young student's face was flushed as if with recent exercise, and, while perceiving this, he could not fail to observe that the face was one of the handsomest, and at the same time the noblest, he had ever looked upon. As an artist, Harold Jerningham was impressed by the perfect outline of that grand fair face; as an observer of mankind, he was conscious that the stamp of high thoughts had been set upon the countenance, and that the light of a pure young soul shone out of the eyes that were slowly raised to look at him as he drew near the log on which the student reclined. He went near enough to see the title of the book the young man was reading. It was one of the Platonic Dialogues, in Greek.

"Ho, ho!" thought Mr. Jerningham; "I

took my young gentleman for a gamekeeper, or the son of my bailiff; but even in this levelling age I doubt if gamekeepers or embryo bailiffs are so far advanced in Greek. I suppose he is a friend of De Bergerac's.

Having arrived at this conclusion, Mr. Jerningham proceeded to accost the young dreamer, for whom that leafless avenue was peopled day by day with the images of all that was greatest and most beautiful in the golden age of this earth, and to whom the romantic desolation of Greenlands had become far dearer within the last four months than it had ever been to the lord of mansion and park, forest and upland.

"Do you not find it rather cold for that kind of reading?" asked the proprietor of the avenue.

The frank young face was turned to him with a smile.

"Not at all; I have been walking for the last hour, and feel as warm as if it were midsummer."

He looked just a little wonderingly at Mr.

Jerningham as he spoke. He knew all the visitors to the Grange, and assuredly this gentleman in a fur-lined overcoat was not one of them. Some stranger, perhaps, who had found the gate open, and had strayed into the park out of curiosity.

"You seem accustomed to this kind of open-air study," said the traveller, seating himself on one end of the fallen log, in order to get a better view of the student's face. It was only the listless curiosity of an idler that beguiled him into loitering thus. He had for the latter years of his life been at best only a loiterer upon the highways and byways of this world, and the interest which he felt in this young student of Plato was the same kind of interest he might have felt in a solitary little Savoyard with white mice, or some semi-idiotic old reaper, toiling under a southern sun; an interest by no means so warm as that which a picture or a statue inspired in this jaded wanderer.

"Yes," replied the young man; "I spend all my leisure mornings in the park, reading and

thinking. I fancy one thinks better when one walks in such a place as this."

"If by 'one' you speak of *yourself*, I have no doubt you are right; but if your 'one' means mankind in general, I am sure you are wrong. My dreariest thoughts have come to me under these trees this morning."

The young man's face was quick to express sympathy, in a look that was half wonder, half pity.

"How quick a man's sympathies are at his age!" thought Harold Jerningham, "and how soon they wear out!"

And then, after a pause, he added, aloud, "You live somewhere near at hand, I suppose?"

"I live very near at hand; I live in the park."

"At the great house!" exclaimed Mr. Jerningham. "After all, my handsome young student will turn out to be the self-educated son or nephew of my housekeeper," he thought, not without some slight sense of vexation; for he

had been studying the young man's profile, and had given him credit for patrician blood on the strength of the delicate modelling of nose and chin.

"No; not at the great house. I live with M. de Bergerac, at the Grange."

"You live with De Bergerac! You are not his—no, he has no son."

"I have the honour to be his secretary."

"Indeed! and an Englishman! Has De Bergerac turned political agitator, or Orleanist conspirator, that he must needs have a secretary?"

"No; it is my privilege to assist M. de Bergerac in the preparation of a great literary work."

"I am pleased to hear you speak as if you valued that privilege, my young friend," said Mr. Jerningham, with more warmth than was usual to him.

"I do indeed prize it more highly than anything on earth," answered the young man; and as he said this, his face flushed crimson to the roots of his hair.

"Why the deuce does he blush like a girl when I say something commonly civil to him?" thought Mr. Jerningham.

"You speak as if you knew M. de Bergerac," said the student, presently.

"I do know him. He is the best friend I have in the world."

"Ah, then, I believe I have the pleasure of speaking to Mr. Jerningham, the owner of this place?"

"You do enjoy that supreme bliss; I am Mr. Jerningham; and now, as you have guessed my name, perhaps you will tell me yours."

"My name is Eustace Thorburn."

"And why the deuce does he blush like a girl when he tells me his name?" thought Mr. Jerningham, taking note of a second crimson flush that came and went upon the brow and cheek of the student.

"And my good friend is well and happy?" he asked, presently.

"Very well, very cheerful. Shall I hurry back to the Grange, and tell him you have

arrived, Mr. Jerningham? I have heard him speak of you so much, and I know what a pleasure it will be to him to hear of your coming."

"And it will be a pleasure to me to announce it with my own lips. You must not come between me and my pleasures, Mr.—Mr. Thorburn; they are very few."

"Believe me, I should be sorry to do so," replied Eustace, as the two men bowed and parted; Mr. Jerningham to walk on towards the house, Eustace to resume his lonely ramble.

"You would be sorry? Not you!" mused the owner of Greenlands, as he walked slowly along the pathway that was so thickly strewn with dead leaves. "What does youth care how it tramples on the hopes of the old? When I refused the young bride my father and mother had chosen for me, and the alliance that had been the fairest dream they had woven for my future, what heed had I for the bitterness of their disappointment? The girl

was pretty, and true and innocent, the daughter of a nobler house than mine, and the beloved of my kindred; but she was not———. Well; she was not Ægeria; she was not the mystic nymph of an enchanted grot; she was only an amiable young lady whom I had known from childhood, and about whom some mischievous demon had whispered into my ear the hateful fact that she was intended for me. I met my Ægeria after; and what came of it? Ah, me! that our brightest dreams must end so coldly! Numa's nymph came to him only in the evening; and perhaps there are few men who could retain the fervour of their devotion for an Ægeria of all day long, and to-morrow, and the day after, and the day after that again. And then your mortal Ægeria has such a capacity for tears. A cold look, a hasty word, an accidental reference to the past, a hint of the uncertainty of the future—and the nymph is transformed into a waterfall. It is the fable of Hippocrene over again; but the fount is not so revivifying as that classic spring."

From thinking of his own past, Mr. Jerningham fell to musing upon Eustace Thorburn's future.

"He has that which all the lands of the Jerninghams could not buy for me, were I free to barter them," he said to himself, bitterly: "youth and hope, youth and hope! Will he waste both treasures as I wasted them, I wonder? I think not. He has a thoughtfulness and gravity of expression that promise well for his future. And how his face brightens when he smiles! Was I ever so handsome as that, I wonder, in the days when the world called me—dangerous? No, never! At its best, my face wanted the earnestness that is the highest charm of his. Why do I compare myself with him? Because I have ended life just as he is beginning it, I suppose. The Alpha and the Omega meet, and Omega is jealous of his fair young rival. How little the landscape has changed since I was like that youngster yonder, newly returned from Oxford, with my head crammed with the big talk of

Greek orators and the teaching of Greek sophists, eager to exhaust the delights of the universe in the shortest period possible; eager to gather all the flowers of youth and manhood, so as to leave the great Sahara of middle age without a blossom! And the flowers have been gathered and have faded, and have been thrown away, and the great Sahara remains entirely barren. No, not entirely; there is at least one solitary leaflet—one poor little pale blossom—my friendship for De Bergerac."

Musing thus, the owner of Greenlands turned aside from that solemn avenue, at the end of which there frowned upon him the noble red-brick dwelling-house of England's Augustine era. He had no desire to reënter that stately abode, where the plump goddesses and nymphs of Kneller disported themselves upon the domed ceilings, and where the twelve Cæsars in black marble scowled upon him from their niches in the circular entrance-hall. Solomon himself could have been no more weary of the vineyards he had planted—and

vines of one's own planting are at best but poor creatures—than was Mr. Jerningham of Sir Godfrey's nymphs and the scowling Cæsars.

"And Cleopatra once tolerated one of *ces messieurs*," he had said to himself sometimes, as he looked round the grand, gloomy chamber. "Cleopatra, the *espiègle*, the despotic, the Semiramis of Egypt, the Mary Stuart of the Nile, the Ninon of the ancient world."

Between the great avenue and the Queen Anne mansion there stretched the stiff walks of an Italian garden, and across this Mr. Jerningham went to a gate, which opened into the woodiest part of the park. A narrow path across this woody region brought him to the boundary of M. de Bergerac's territory, protected by a six-foot holly-hedge, more formidable than any wall ever fashioned by mortal builder.

A gate cut in this hedge opened into the quaint old flower-garden, and through this gate Mr. Jerningham went to visit his friend, after having passed unknown and unnoticed beneath

the shadow of the house in which he had been born.

"'Tis sweet to hear the watchdog's honest bark bay deep-mouthed welcome—as we draw near home,'" Mr. Jerningham said to himself; "but it is not quite so sweet when the watch-dog rushes out of his kennel, possessed with an evident thirst for one's blood, as that old mastiff yonder rushed at me just now. Every traveller is not a Belisarius. Ah, here we are! there is the pretty old-fashioned lawn, with its flower-beds and evergreens, and there the low rambling cottage in which Jack Fermor, the bailiff, used to live when I was a boy. I remember going to him one summer morning to get my fishing-tackle mended, when I was a lad at Eton. Yes, this looks like a home! Dear old Theodore! I shall be content if he is only half as glad to see me as I shall be to see him."

The returning traveller found the door under the thatched porch unsecured by bolt or bar. In the heart of Greenlands Park no one ever

thought of bolting a door. But the inmates of the Grange were not without their guardians. An enormous black dog sprang forth to meet the stranger as he approached the threshold, formidable as the dragon whose fiery eyes glared upon the luckless companions of Cadmus.

Happily for Mr. Jerningham, the faithful animal was under admirable control. After giving utterance to one low growl, that sounded a warning rather than a threat, he surveyed the intruder with a critical eye, and sniffed at him with a suspicious sniff; and then, being satisfied that the master of Greenlands was not a member of the dangerous classes, he drew politely aside and permitted the visitor to enter.

The door of the drawing-room was wide open, and a cheerful fire burning in the low grate lighted the pleasant picture of a young lady seated at a table reading, with books and writing materials scattered about her.

It was nine years since Harold Jerningham had seen his friend, and it was rather difficult

for him to realize the fact that this young lady could by any possibility be the same individual he remembered in the shape of a pretty, fair-haired child, roaming about the gardens with an ugly mongrel-puppy in her arms, and to whom he had promised the finest dog that Newfoundland could produce.

He had remembered his promise, though he had forgotten the fair young damsel to whom the pledge was given. Hephæstus was the animal imported at the command of Mr. Jerningham. He had been brought to Greenlands a puppy, with big clumsy head and paws, and an all-pervading sleepiness of aspect, and he had flourished and waxed strong under the loving care of Helen, who was fondly attached to him.

The visitor's light footstep scarcely sounded on the carpeted floor, but a warning "yap" from Hephæstus proclaimed the advent of a stranger. Helen rose to receive her father's guest, and welcomed him with a smile and a blush.

"How these Berkshire people blush!" thought Mr. Jerningham; "it is the veritable Arcadia. The inhabitants of Ardennes were not more primitive. Indeed, Rosalind was the most *rusée* of coquettes compared to this young lady."

"What a delightful surprise, Mr. Jerningham!" said Helen, with a frank smile; "papa will be so pleased to see you."

"Then you remember me, Mademoiselle de Bergerac, after so long an interval—an interval that has changed you so much that I could scarcely believe my little playfellow of the garden had grown into this tall young lady?"

"Oh, yes, indeed; I remember you perfectly. The time has changed you very little. And I should have been most ungrateful if I had forgotten you after your kindness."

"My kindness ——?"

"In sending me Hephæstus—the Newfoundland puppy, you know. Papa christened him Hephæstus on account of his blackness. He

has grown such a noble, faithful creature, and we all love him so dearly."

"You all love him? Has your dog so many friends as that emphatic 'all' implies?" asked Mr. Jerningham, wonderingly.

"I mean myself and papa, and papa's secretary, Mr. Thorburn."

The girl stopped suddenly, and this time it was a very vivid blush which dyed her fair young face, for it seemed to her that the eyes of her father's friend were fixed upon her with a pitiless scrutiny.

"Oh, now," thought the master of Greenlands, "I begin to understand why that young man blushed when he spoke of the privilege involved in his position here."

He glanced at the open book which lay under Mademoiselle de Bergerac's hand, and was surprised to perceive that it was a duplicate of the volume he had seen in the hands of the student in the park.

"You read Greek, Mdlle. de Bergerac?"

"Yes, papa taught me a little Greek ever so

long ago. Will you not call me Helen, please? I should like it so much better."

"I shall be much honoured if you will permit me to do so. And you are reading Plato, I see. Is he not rather a difficult author for a young student in Greek?"

"Yes, he seems rather difficult, but I get a great deal of help. I am reading the Phædo with Mr. Thorburn, who is working very hard at the classics. I believe he means to try for his degree by and by, when he leaves papa. He has a German degree already, but he seems to think that worth very little. I think he is rather ambitious."

"He seems to be altogether a wonderful person, this Mr. Thorburn."

"Yes, he is very clever—at least, papa says so, and you know papa is very well able to form a judgment on that point. And papa likes him exceedingly."

"Indeed! and has he been long established here—domiciled with you, in his post of secretary?"

"He has been with us about four months."

"May I ask where your father picked him up—by whose recommendation he came here?"

"It was Mr. Desmond who introduced him to papa,—Mr. Desmond, the editor of the *Areopagus*."

"Ah! that Mr. Desmond has a knack of obliging one."

"Papa has considered himself very fortunate in finding any one able to take the warm interest which Mr. Thorburn takes in his book. It is rather dry work, you know, Mr. Jerningham, verifying quotations in half a dozen languages, and hunting out dates, and names, and all those petty details which used to absorb so much of papa's time when he was without a secretary. Do you know that Mr. Thorburn has often travelled to London and back in the same day, in order to consult some book or manuscript in the British Museum; and he has taught himself Sanscrit since he has been with us, in the hope of making himself still more useful to papa."

The young lady's face glowed with enthusiasm as she said this. To do service for her father was to win the highest claim upon her gratitude. Mr. Jerningham looked at her with a half-smile of amusement, which was not without some shade of bitterness.

"I have no doubt Mr. Thorburn is an inestimable treasure," he said, coldly. "I know a little humpbacked German who is a perfect prodigy of learning—a man who is master of all the dialects of India, and has the Râmâyana at his fingers' ends. I am sure he would have been very glad to perform Mr. Thorburn's duties for half the money my friend gives that ambitious young student; but my German is a perfect Quasimodo in the matter of ugliness, and your papa might object to that."

"I will run to tell papa that you have arrived," said Helen. "I know what real pleasure the news will give him."

She left the room, and Mr. Jerningham remained for some minutes standing by the table, with the volume of Platonic Dialogues open in

his hand, in the very attitude in which she had left him, profoundly meditative of aspect.

"How lovely she is!" he said to himself. "Has this Berkshire air the property of making youth beautiful? That young Thorburn is a model for a Greek sculptor, and she—she is as lovely as Phrynè, when Praxiteles saw her returning from her sea-bath. And Mademoiselle and the secretary are in love with each other. I arrive, like the *seigneur du village* in a French operetta, just in time to assist in a little Arcadian romance. I wonder that De Bergerac should be so absurdly imprudent as to admit this man into his household. He is, no doubt, a nameless adventurer, with nothing but his good looks and some amount of education to recommend him. And he, perhaps, labours under the delusion that our dear recluse is rich. I will take the opportunity of talking to him to-morrow, and opening his eyes on that point. And I must take Theodore to task for his folly. He is as proud as Lucifer, after his own fashion, and would be the last of men to sanction the

alliance of his only child with an English adventurer."

It seemed as if Mr. Jerningham took somewhat kindly to his part of *seigneur du village*, and was by no means inclined to the policy of non-intervention in the affairs of these two young people. It may be that, having so long been an actor in the great drama of human passion, he could not resign himself all at once to the passive share of the spectator, who applauds and delights in the youth and beauty, the joy and the hope in which he has no longer an active interest. He knew that it was time for him to fall back into the ranks, and see a new hero lead the great procession; but he could not retire with the perfect grace of a man who has played his part, and is content to know that the part has been well played, and has come to a decent finish. The art of growing old is the one accomplishment which the *beau garçon* never acquires.

For his own part, Harold Jerningham believed that he had retired with a very decent

grace from that field in which his victories had been so many. Prone though he was to anatomize the follies of himself and other men, he had not learned the mystery of that vague sentiment of bitterness and disappointment which had tinged his mind during the later years of his life.

He had taken existence lightly, and had taught himself to believe that the ills of life which press most heavily on other men had left him unscathed; but there were times in which the tide that carried him along so pleasantly seemed all at once to come to a dead stop. The rapid river was transformed into a dreary patch of stagnant water, black with foul weeds, and poisonous with fatal miasmas; and Mr. Jerningham was compelled to acknowledge that no man, of his own election, can resign his share in the sorrows of humanity.

He told himself very often that he had done with emotion, and that life henceforth must be for him an affair of sensation only; his peace of mind depended on the perfect adjustment of

his *ménage* when he was at home, and on the tact of his courier when he travelled. But there were moments in which the subtle voice of his conscience whispered that this was only one more among the many delusions of his life. Thus, when circumstances transpired to prove that his young wife's heart had been given to another, even while her honour was yet unsullied, he had arranged an immediate separation, with the nonchalance of a man who settles the most trivial affair in the business of life, fancying that he should escape thereby all those slow agonies and bitter throes that are wont to rack the breasts of men who find themselves compelled to part from their wives. But in this, as in all other transactions of his existence, he had been the dupe of his own selfish philosophy. The sting of his wife's ingratitude was none the less keen because he thrust her from him with a careless hand. The sense of his own desolation was none the less intense because he had not suffered himself to love the woman to whom he had given his

name. Even considered from a selfish man's point of view, his Horatian philosophy of indifference had been a failure. The fact that it had been so, and that he might have lived a better life for himself in living a little for other people, was just beginning to dawn upon him.

One pure pleasure he was to taste on this day—the pleasure that springs from real friendship. That one unselfish impulse which had prompted him to provide a pleasant home for an old friend, won him an ample return. Theodore de Bergerac's welcome touched him to the heart. It was so warm, so real, so different from the polished flatteries he had been of late accustomed to receive, with a conventional smile upon his lips and the bitterness of unspeakable scorn in his heart. To this man, so courted, so flattered, it was a new thing to know himself honestly loved.

De Bergerac was delighted by his friend's return.

"I thought we were never to see you again,

Jerningham," he said, after the first welcomes had been spoken, the first inquiries made; "and this little girl here, has been so anxious to behold her benefactor. I think she is more grateful to you for her big black dog than for the home that has sheltered her since her birth."

And hereupon Helen blushed, and looked shyly downward to her friend and worshipper, the Newfoundland. Mr. Jerningham began to think that those maidenly blushes which he had observed while talking to the young lady about her father's secretary, were only the result of a certain youthful bashfulness, very charming in a pretty girl, rather than an indication of that tender secret which he had at first suspected.

Helen looked first at the dog and then at her father, just a little reproachfully.

"As if I could ever be sufficiently grateful for my home, papa!" she said; and then raising those innocent blue eyes to the visitor's face, she added, gently, "You can never imagine how papa and I love Greenlands, Mr. Jerningham, or how grateful we are to you for

our beautiful home. I think it is the loveliest place in the whole world."

"And from such a traveller that opinion should stand for something," added her father, laughing at the girl's enthusiasm.

"I am almost inclined to agree with Miss De Bergerac—with Helen, since she has given me permission to call her Helen," said Harold, with some slight significance of tone; "I am inclined to think Greenlands the loveliest place in the world."

"And yet you so rarely come to it, Mr. Jerningham!" cried Helen.

"I did not know the power of its charm until to-day. A returning wanderer is very sensitive to such impressions, you see, Helen."

"Yes, I can fancy that. But you have been in very beautiful places. You wrote to papa from Switzerland last year. Ah, how I envied you then!"

"Indeed! you wish to see Switzerland?"

"Oh! yes. Switzerland and Italy are just the two countries that I do really languish to

behold; the first for its beauty, the second for its associations."

"Your father must contrive to take you to both countries."

"I think he would do so, perhaps, if it were not for his book. I could not be so selfish as to take him away from that."

"But the book is near completion, is it not, De Bergerac?"

The student shook his head rather despondently.

"It is a subject that grows upon one," he said, doubtfully; "my material is all prepared, and the extent of it is something enormous. I find the work of classification very laborious. Indeed, there have been times when I should have well-nigh abandoned myself to despair, if it had not been for my young coadjutor."

"Ah! yes; your secretary, the young fellow I met in the park—something of a pedant and prig, is he not?"

"Not the least in the world. He is a born poet."

"Indeed!" cried Mr. Jerningham, with a sneer; "your pedant is a nuisance, and your prig is a bore; but of all the insufferable creatures in this world, your born poet is the worst."

"I don't think you will dislike Eustace Thorburn when you come to know him," answered De Bergerac; "and I shall be very glad if you can interest yourself in his career. He is highly gifted, and I believe quite friendless."

Mr. Jerningham looked at Helen, curious to see how she was affected by this conversation; but this time her face betrayed no emotion, and in the next minute she quickly left the room, "on hospitable thoughts intent," and eager to hold counsel with the powers of the household. Mr. Jerningham would, in all probability, dine at the cottage, and weighty questions, involving a choice of fish and poultry, for the time banished all other thoughts from the young lady's mind.

"Let me congratulate you upon being the father of that lovely girl," said Harold, when she was gone.

"Yes, I suppose she is very pretty. Like a Madonna, by Raphael, is she not? the *belle jardinière*, or the *Madone de la chaise*. And she is as good as she is beautiful. Yes, I thank God for having given me that dear child. Without her I should be only a bookish abstraction; with her I am a happy man."

"Unluckily for you, the day must come when she will make the happiness of some other man."

"Why unluckily? I do not suppose my daughter's husband will refuse me a corner by his fireside."

"That depends upon the kind of man he may be."

"She would scarcely choose the kind of man who would deny her father's right to take his place in her home; not as a dependant, but in the simple Continental fashion, as a member of the household, with a due share in all its responsibilities."

"You will, perhaps, arrange your daughter's marriage in the Continental fashion, and choose

her husband for her when the fitting time comes?"

"By no means. I have scarcely ever contemplated the question. My dear child is all in all to me; and it is just possible I may be a little jealous of the man who shall divide her heart with me. But I will not tamper with the ways of Providence in so solemn a question as her happiness. She shall marry the man of her choice, be he rich or poor, noble or simple."

"And if she should make a foolish choice?"

"She will not make a foolish choice. She is the child of my own teaching, and I will answer for her wisdom. She will be the dupe of no falsehood, the victim of no artifice. She will never mistake *clinquant* for gold."

"You are very bold, my dear De Bergerac. Certainly the young lady seems the first remove from an angel; and I suppose the angels see all things clearly. And now let us talk about your secretary. How did you pick him up?"

"He was recommended to me by Mr. Desmond, of the *Areopagus*. I think you know

Mr. Desmond?" added the simple scholar, who lived remote from those regions in which the Platonic attachment of the lady and the editor was current gossip.

"Yes," said Mr. Jerningham, briefly, "I know him. And he recommended this young man—Thorburn? And now you must not be angry with me if I seem impertinent. Do you think it was quite wise to admit this protégé of Mr. Desmond's to such very intimate association with your household?"

"Why not?"

"I suppose you happened to forget that you have a daughter?"

Theodore de Bergerac flushed crimson to the temples.

"Do you imagine that this young man would repay my confidence by a clandestine courtship of my daughter, or that she would receive his addresses?" he cried, indignantly.

"My dear De Bergerac, far be it from me to imagine anything. I only wish to suggest that it is rather foolish to bring a handsome

young man, with a taste for poetry and a love for learning, and a very lovely girl, more or less affected by the same tastes, into such intimate association, unless you wish them to fall in love with each other."

"Yes, I dare say you are right; I dare say I have acted foolishly," replied the student, thoughtfully. "But I really never looked at the affair in that light; and then I have such perfect confidence in Helen's purity of mind, and in the soundness of her judgment. I am so fully assured that no such thing as secresy could ever exist where she is concerned. And then, again, as for this young Thorburn, I have watched him closely, and I believe him to be all that is honourable and excellent."

"You have not watched him with the eyes of worldly experience."

"Perhaps not; but I fancy there is an inner light better than a worldly man's wisdom. I would pledge myself for that young man's honour and honesty."

"The fact that he is such a paragon will

not prevent your daughter from falling in love with him."

"No; it is just possible that she might become attached to him. I know she likes and admires him; but I fancy she only does so on account of his usefulness to me. However, the danger is incurred. I cannot dismiss a faithful coadjutor hurriedly or abruptly; and I am really very much interested in Eustace Thorburn. I believe there is the fire of real genius in all he does; and to my mind real genius must secure ultimate success."

"Surely Chatterton's was genius?"

"Undoubtedly; and Chatterton must have succeeded if he had been patient; but genius without patience is the flame without the oil. I believe there is a bright career before Eustace Thorburn; and if I knew that my daughter and he loved each other, earnestly and truly, I would not be the man to stand between them and say, 'It shall not be.'"

"How much do you know of Mr. Thorburn's antecedents?"

"Not very much. I know that he was educated at a great public school in Belgium, and for the last few years was a tutor in the same school. His mother seems to have been a widow from an early period. She died a few weeks before he came to me. He speaks of her very rarely, but with extreme tenderness. Of his father he never speaks."

"He has no doubt excellent reasons for such reticence. In plain English, my dear De Bergerac, I take it that your young favourite is an adventurer."

"He is an adventurer who has earned his bread by the exercise of his intellect since he was seventeen years of age," answered De Bergerac. "I have seen his testimonials, signed by the powers of the Parthenée at Villebrumeuse, and I need no man's attestation of his honour and honesty. You are prejudiced against him, my dear Harold."

"I am prejudiced against all the world except you, Theodore," replied the master of Greenlands, with some touch of feeling.

There was a certain amount of truth in this sweeping assertion. This man, to whom fortune had been so liberal, had of late abandoned himself to a spirit of bitterness that involved all men and all things. But of all things hateful to this weary sybarite, the most hateful was the insolence of youth and hope, the glory of that morning sunshine which must shine on him no more. It may be that in his jaundiced eyes Eustace had seemed to wear his bright young manhood with a certain air of insolence, to blazon the freshness and sunlight of life's morning before the jaded traveller hastening down the westward-sloping hill that leads to the realms of night. However this was, Mr. Jerningham was evidently disposed to be captious and argumentative on the subject of his friend's secretary. Theodore de Bergerac, perceiving this, contrived to change the drift o the conversation. He talked of his book; and Mr. Jerningham, who was faintly interested in all literary questions, expressed a really warm interest in this one labour. He talked of old

acquaintances, old associations; and the smile of the wanderer brightened with unwonted animation.

It was four o'clock when dinner was announced. The two men had been talking so pleasantly, that it was only by the deepening of the afternoon shadows they knew the progress of time. The little dining-room was bright with the light of moderator-lamps on table and sideboard, when Mr. Jerningham and his host entered.

Helen stood waiting for them in the soft lamplight, with Eustace Thorburn by her side.

"Neither Mr. Thorburn nor I would come into the drawing-room to disturb your talk, papa," she said. "He has been giving me my Greek lesson by the fire in here, while Sarah laid the cloth. You should see how she stares when we come to the sonorous words. I am sure she thinks we are a little out of our minds. You are to sit opposite papa, if you please, Mr. Jerningham. I hope you won't dislike dining at

this early hour. We generally dine at three; and a really late dinner would have frightened our cook."

"My dear Helen, I have eaten nothing to-day, and am as hungry as a hunter. If you are going to make excuses, it must be for not having given us our dinner at three. How pretty your table looks, with that old Indian bowl of cream-coloured china asters and scarlet geraniums!"

"They are from one of the greenhouses at the great house. The gardeners are very good to me, and allow me as many flowers as a like, when our own dear little garden is exhausted."

"They should be no gardeners of mine if they were otherwise than good to you.—How do you do, once more, Mr. Thorburn?" added the master of Greenlands, looking across the table at the secretary, who had quietly seated himself in his accustomed place. "I did not think we should dine together when I came upon you this morning in the park."

This was an extreme concession on the part of Mr. Jerningham. As the two men faced each other in the lamplight, Theodore de Bergerac looked at them with an expression of surprise.

"Did nothing strike you this morning, Jerningham, when you first saw Mr. Thorburn?" he asked, smiling.

"A great many things struck me. But what especial thing should have struck me, that you know of, my dear De Bergerac?"

"The likeness of your own youth. It really seems to me that there is something of a resemblance between you and Thorburn."

"I did not perceive it," said Mr. Jerningham, with a coolness of tone that was not flattering to the younger man.

"Nor did I," added the secretary, promptly.

This was a kind of preliminary passage-at-arms between the two men, who seemed foredoomed to be enemies in the great conflict of life.

"Well, I suppose every one sees these things with a different eye," said De Bergerac; "but really I fancy there is some likeness between you two."

CHAPTER II.

MISS ST. ALBANS BREAKS HER ENGAGEMENT.

Amid the many distractions of an editorial life, Mr. Desmond contrived to remember the promise made to his old tutor. He proved the warmth of his interest in Miss Alford's dramatic career by an immediate appeal to the genial manager of the Theatre Royal, Pall Mall, and received in reply Mr. Hartstone's assurance that the first vacancy in the young-lady department should be placed at Miss St. Albans' disposal.

"Bovisbrook has just sent me a charming little adaptation of *Côtelettes sautées chez Vefour*," wrote Mr. Hartstone, in conclusion; "and as I find there are six young ladies in the caste—*ces dames* of the Quartier Breda, I believe, in the original, but very cleverly transmogrified by Bovisbrook into school-girls from a Peckham

academy, who go to dine with an old West-Indian uncle at Verey's—I think I could manage to find an engagement for Miss St. Albans as early as March, when my Christmas burlesque will have had its run."

"As early as March!" said Mr. Desmond, as he read this letter; "and what is to become of that poor stage-struck little girl between this and March? Well, I suppose she can go back to Market Deeping, and shine as Pauline and Juliet, until the *côtelettes sautées* piece is produced."

Having received a favourable reply from the lessee of the Pall Mall, Mr. Desmond's next duty was to communicate its contents to the expectant father and daughter. At first, he thought of enclosing Hartstone's friendly epistle, with a few lines from himself; but, on reflection, he decided against this plan of action.

"Lucy might form exaggerated expectations from Hartstone's letter," he said to himself. "I think I had better see her."

There were no parties in Mr. Desmond's world just now. Every one worthy of a fashionable editor's consideration was out of town, and the gentleman had his evenings to himself. It was over his solitary dinner-table that Mr. Desmond arrived at this conclusion; and it was to the Oxford Road Theatre that he bent his steps after dinner, knowing that he was most likely to find Lucy Alford there.

The play was "The Stranger." He went into the dingy dress-circle for half an hour, and saw Mrs. Haller play her penitent scene with the Countess. Miss St. Albans looked very pretty as she grovelled at the feet of her kindly patroness, dressed in white muslin which was in the last stage of limpness, and with a penitential white-lace cap upon her girlish head. He waited patiently through the rest of the play, and went to the green-room after the last dismal scene, impressed with the conviction that Lucy Alford was one of the dearest and prettiest of girls, but not yet on the high-road to becoming a Siddons.

He found poor little Mrs. Haller alone in the green-room, with a book in her hand, and with a very plaintive expression of countenance. She brightened a little on recognizing the visitor; but while shaking hands with her, Mr. Desmond perceived that her eyes were red, as with much weeping.

"I did not think you felt the character so deeply," he said; "those real tears are a very good sign for a young actress."

Lucy shook her head, despondently.

"It isn't that," she said; "I-I-was c-c-crying bec-c-cause I am n-not to play J-J-J-Julia!"

Hereupon she fairly broke down and sobbed aloud, to the consternation of Mr. Desmond, who did not know how to console this poor weeping maiden. The sight of a woman's tears was always very painful to him; and for this young childlike creature he felt a pity that was especially tender.

"My dear little girl," he said, "pray don't cry. Tell me all about this business. Who is

Julia?—what is Julia?—and why are you not to play Julia?"

"It's Julia in the "Hunchback"—Sheridan Knowles's "Hunchback," you know," replied Miss St. Albans, conquering her emotion with a stupendous effort, and telling her story with a most piteous air. "I was looking forward so to playing that very part. I played Juliet at Market Deeping, you know, and the *Deeping Advertiser* said the kindest things about me,—that I reminded him of Miss O'Neill—though I can't exactly imagine how the critic on the *Advertiser* could remember Miss O'Neill's acting, as he is not yet nineteen years of age. And I have such pretty dresses for Julia—a silver-gray silk, that was poor mamma's wedding-dress, and is not so *very* scanty, as I wear it looped up over a white muslin petticoat, in the King Charles style, you know. And just when I was so pleased at the idea that the piece was going to be done, Mr. de Mortemar came to me and told me, quite cruelly, that I am not to play Julia. And there is a young lady coming

to play the part—at least, she is not very young—an amateur lady, who comes in a brougham with two horses, and whose dresses, they say, cost hundreds of pounds."

"An amateur lady! That is rather curious. And why does Mr. de Mortemar wish that she should play Julia?"

"Mr. Johnson says she will pay him a great deal of money for the privilege. The houses have been, oh, so bad, and Mr. de Mortemar is very angry to find he doesn't draw. He says there's a cabal against him."

"Indeed! And this amateur lady comes to his relief, with her dresses that cost hundreds of pounds! I should have thought that an amateur lady, who keeps her brougham and pair, would scarcely care to make her *début* at the Oxford Road Theatre. Have you seen this lady?"

"Yes. She has been to rehearsal; and she has been here in the evening to see the call for the next day. I dare say she will come this evening. She is very haughty, and takes no

more notice of me than if I were the ground under her feet; and, oh, you should see the heels of her boots!"

"She must be a vulgar, presuming person, in spite of her boots and her brougham. But if I were you, I should not trouble myself at all about her or the character she is to play. It will only be one leaf stolen from your laurels."

He said this with a smile, in which there was some shade of sadness. There was something very sad to his eyes in the spectacle of this girlish struggler in the great battle of life, and in the thought of that frail foundation whereon her hopes rested.

"She never can be a great actress, with such poor opportunities as she can have," he said to himself; "and she will go on from year to year hoping against hope, patiently enduring the same drudgery, living down perpetual disappointments, until some day, when she is sixty years of age, she will break her heart all at once because some petty provincial

manager refuses her the *rôle* of Juliet, after she has played it for forty years, like the actress in the old story. Poor little Lucy! She is not the kind of woman before whose indomitable courage all obstacles must succumb. She was made to be happy in a bright home."

"Hark!" cried the young lady of whom he was thinking, "there is Miss Ida Courtenay talking to Mr. de Mortemar."

"Miss Ida Courtenay?"

"Yes; the amateur lady who is to play Julia."

"Oh, indeed! her name is Ida Courtenay; and she comes to the theatre in her brougham, and wears unimaginable heels to her boots. I think a Cuvier of social science might describe the species of the lady from those particulars."

Lucy only stared on hearing this remark, which was not intended for her comprehension.

"At eleven!" cried a loud, coarse voice without; "quite impossible. I shall be engaged till one. You must call the "Hunchback" at half-past one."

"It will be rather inconvenient," murmured the brilliant De Mortemar, in a respectful, nay even obsequious tone of voice.

"Oh, bother your inconvenience! The piece must be rehearsed at half-past one, or not at all, as far as I am concerned. *I* don't want a rehearsal. It's for your people the rehearsal is wanted. I'm sure your Helen is such an abominable stick that I expect to be cut up in my scenes with her, if I don't take care."

"Oh!" cried Miss Alford, with a little gasp.

"Who is the lady that plays Helen so badly?" asked Mr. Desmond.

"It's—it's I who am to play Helen," exclaimed poor Lucy. "Isn't it shameful of her to say that? I was letter-perfect yesterday when we rehearsed—I was, indeed, Mr. Desmond. And Miss Courtenay read her part all through the piece. And now she says—oh, it's really too bad—"

A mighty rushing sound, as of a Niagara of moire antique, heralded the approach of the

lady in question, who bounced into the green-room, and swept past Mr. Desmond with the air of a Semiramis in high-heeled boots. She was a tall stalwart personage of about thirty-five years of age, and she was as handsome as rouge, pearl-powder, painted lips, painted nostrils, painted eyelids, painted eyebrows, and a liberal supply of false hair could make her. The share that nature had in her beauty was limited to a pair of fierce black eyes, which might have been sufficiently large and lustrous without the aid of Indian ink or belladonna; and the outline of a figure which the masculine critic usually denominates "fine." Mauve moire antique, a white-lace burnous, and a bonnet from the Burlington Arcade, did the rest; and the general result was a very resplendent creature, of a type which has become too familiar to the eyes of English citizens and citizenesses in this latter half of the nineteenth century.

Towards this lady Mr. de Mortemar's manner exhibited a deference which was somewhat

surprising, and not a little displeasing, to the editor of the *Areopagus*.

"Good evening, sir," said the provincial Roscius, on perceiving Laurence. "I am gratified to find you again a witness of our performance. You will have observed a wide difference of style between my Claude and my Stranger. Those two characters mark, if I may be permitted the expression, the opposite poles of my dramatic sphere. Claude, the lover, belongs to my torrid zone; Steinforth, the outraged husband, locked in the icy armour of his pride—snow-bound, as I may say, by the bitter drift of woe—is my polar region. I venture to hope that you were struck by the different phases of passion in my silent recognition of Mrs. Haller. My provincial critics have been good enough to assure me that the whole gamut of emotional feeling is run by me in that situation."

"I fear that I am scarcely qualified to form a judgment upon your acting, Mr. de Mortemar," the editor replied, very coldly; "I was

not very attentive to the performance this evening. I came to the theatre only to see Miss Al —Miss St. Albans—whose father is one of my earliest friends. I am sorry to find that she has reason to consider herself somewhat ill-used by your stage-manager in the matter of a certain caste of the *Hunchback*."

The attention of Miss Ida Courtenay had, until this moment, been occupied by some official documents stuck against a little board upon the mantelpiece; but on hearing these words pronounced in a very audible manner by Mr. Desmond, she turned abruptly, and glared at that gentleman with all the ferocity of which her fine eyes were capable. She lived among people with whom this kind of glare generally proved effective, and she expected to subjugate Mr. Desmond as easily as it was her wont to subjugate the weak-minded individuals with whom she consorted.

She found, to her mortification, that in this case she had glared in vain. The editor of the *Arcopagus* did not flinch before the angry

glances of this Semiramis of Lodge Road, but calmly awaited Mr. de Mortemar's explanation.

"I am my own stage-manager," replied that gentleman, with offended majesty; "and I have yet to learn by what right Miss St. Albans considers herself ill-treated in this theatre. This is not the return which I expected from a young lady for whom my influence alone could have secured a hearing from a London audience."

"Pray do not let us have any high-flown talk of that kind, Mr. de Mortemar," said Laurence, with some slight impatience of tone. "I am quite sure that you would not have engaged Miss St. Albans if it had not suited you to do so. I believe you engaged her for what is technically called leading business—the whole of the leading business."

"There was no written engagement. I offered to engage Miss St. Albans, and she was only too glad to accept my offer. Until this time she has played the complete range of leading characters."

"Indeed! Then, as there is no formal engagement, and as you have found a lady who wishes to supersede Miss St. Albans, I suppose there can be no objection to this young lady's withdrawal from your company?"

Lucy looked terribly alarmed by this speech.

"I—I wouldn't inconvenience Mr. de Mortemar for the world," she faltered; but Laurence would not allow her to say more.

"You must let me act for you in this matter, Miss Alford," he said. "As I am your father's friend, and as I am rather more experienced in theatrical matters than he is, I shall venture to take this affair into my own hands. You may consider yourself free to cast your pieces without reference to this young lady, Mr. de Mortemar; she will not again act in your theatre."

"But she must act in my theatre!" cried the infuriated tragedian. "Do you suppose you are to come here interfering with my arrangements, and taking away my actresses, in this manner? You ignore me in your paper, and then you

come and insult me in my green-room. Really, this is a little too bad!"

"I think some of your arrangements are a little too bad, Mr. de Mortemar. I will be answerable for any legal penalty you may be able to inflict upon Miss St. Albans, whose engagement I hold to be no engagement at all. For the rest, you have Miss Courtenay, who will, no doubt, be delighted to play a round of characters."

"Oh, indeed!" cried that lady, with ironical politeness; "you're monstrously wise about other people's business, upon my word, sir. But, though I've seen a good deal of cool impudence in my life, I never witnessed cooler impudence than I've seen in this room to-night. If you knew what you were talking about, you'd know that I play Julia in the *Hunchback*, and Constance in the *Love-Chase*, and play nothing else. My dresses for those two characters were made for me by Madame Carabine Nourrisson, of Paris, and I should be sorry to tell you what they cost."

"I should be very sorry to hear it. I am too much of a political economist not to regret that money should be spent in that way. However, as you like the cream of the drama so much, Miss Courtenay, would it not be as well to try a little of the skim-milk? If you really want to be an actress, you cannot do better than extend your experience by some of the drudgery that Miss St. Albans has so industriously gone through."

"If I want to be an actress!" cried the outraged lady. "And pray who may have told you that I want to be an actress?"

"If that is not your design, *que diable venez-vous faire dans cette galère?*"

"I don't understand Latin, and I don't want to," replied the fair Ida, with a venemous look at Mr. Desmond; "but I beg to tell you that I am a lady of independent means, and that I act for my own amusement, and the amusement of my friends."

"I have no doubt of the latter fact," murmured Laurence, politely.

"And I have no intention whatever of sinking to a poor, weak, trodden-down drudge, in limp white muslin, like some actresses I could mention."

"Indeed, Miss Courtenay! And are you aware that it is you, and ladies of your class, who bring discredit upon the profession which you condescend to take up for the amusement of your idle evenings? It is this—amateur—element which contaminates the atmosphere of our theatres, and the manager who fosters it is an enemy to the interests he is bound to protect."

"Oh, indeed!" exclaimed Miss Courtenay, who was very weak in a conversational tussle, where neither fierce looks nor strong language were admissible. And then, finding herself powerless against her unknown assailant, she turned with Medea-like ferocity upon the injured and innocent Manager. "I'll tell you what it is, Mr. de Mortemar," she cried; "since you are so mean-spirited as to let me be insulted in this manner, I beg you to under-

stand that I shall never enter your theatre again—no, Mr. de Mortemar, not if you were to go down on your knees to me. And you may find some one else to play Julia, and you may let your private boxes yourself, if you can, which I know you can't; and I have the honour to wish you good evening."

Hereupon Miss Courtenay swept out of the room. And thus it happened that at one fell swoop Mr. de Mortemar was deprived of both his heroines, much to his discomfiture; but not to his entire annihilation. The unconquerable force of conscious genius supported him in this extremity.

"I can send on my walking-lady and second-chambermaid for Julia and Helen," he said to himself. "After all, what does it matter how the women's parts are played? The feature of the play is my Master Walter; and I don't suppose the audience would care what sticks I put in the other characters."

This is how he consoled himself in the seclusion of his dressing-room, whither he retired,

after bestowing upon Mr. Desmond a scathing look, but no words of reproach. The editor of the *Areopagus* was a person whom an embryo Kean could hardly afford to offend.

Lucy Alford departed to change the penitential white muslin of Mrs. Haller for the well-worn merino dress and dark shawl and bonnet in which she came to the theatre. Before doing so, she told Mr. Desmond that it was her father's habit to wait for her every evening at the close of the performance in the immediate neighbourhood of the stage-door.

"Then I will go and wait there with him," said Mr. Desmond. "I must excuse myself to him for the liberty I have taken in breaking your engagement, and explain my motive for taking that liberty. I'm sure your father will approve my reasons for acting as I did."

"I'm sure of that," answered Lucy; and then she blushed, as she added, falteringly, "I scarcely think you would like to go to the place where papa waits for me; it is a kind of

public-house, two doors from the theatre. The gentlemen of the company go there a good deal, and as papa finds it so very dull in the dress-circle when the play is over, he is obliged to go there."

"I am not at all afraid of going there in search of him. I shall not say good-night until I have seen you comfortably seated in your cab."

"You are very kind; but on fine nights we generally walk home. Papa likes the walk."

She blushed as she said this; and the blush smote the very heart of Laurence Desmond. It was not the first time that he had seen those fair young cheeks crimsoned by that shame of the sinless—the sense of poverty; and the thought of those trials and humiliations which this gentle, innocent, tender creature had to bear touched him deeply.

He thought of the women he met in his own world—women who would have uttered a shriek of horror at the idea of walking in the streets of London at any hour of the day, to say

nothing of the night; and here was this poor child walking every night from one end of London to the other, after mental and physical fatigue which would have prostrated those other women for a week. He thought of the extravagance, the exaction, the egotism, which he had seen in the women he met in society; and he asked himself how many among the brightest and best of those he knew were as pure and true as this girl, for whom the present was so hard a slavery, the future so dark an enigma.

He left the theatre, and found that the establishment of which she had spoken as "a kind of public-house," was an actual public-house, and nothing else. He went in at that quieter and more aristocratic portal on which the mystic phrase "Jugs and Bottles" was inscribed; but even here he found a select circle engaged in the consumption of gin-and-bitters. He inquired for Mr. St. Albans—concluding that the gentleman would be best known by his daughter's professional alias—and the old

man speedily emerged from a parlour where some noisy gentlemen were playing bagatelle.

The old tutor was not a little disconcerted on beholding Laurence Desmond, and faltered a feeble apology as the two men went out into the street together.

"I am obliged to wait somewhere, you see, Desmond," he said. "I can't stand Harry Bestow in the farces; and I can't hang about the green-room; Mortemar doesn't like it. So I take a glass of bitter ale in there. The Prince of Wales is a regular theatrical house, and one hears all sorts of news about the West-end theatres."

Mr. Desmond wondered that the bitter ale dispensed at the Prince of Wales should perfume the breath of the consumer with so powerful an odour of gin. He gave no expression to this wonder, however, but proceeded to relate what he had done in the green-room.

"Yes, very right, very right, Desmond," said Tristram Alford, rather despondently, when

he had heard all. "My little Lucy ought not to act with such a woman as that; and she can go back to Market Deeping for the new year. The journey will be expensive—but——"

"You must let me arrange that little matter in my own way," Laurence said, kindly. "I can promise Miss Alford an engagement at the Pall Mall, in March; and in the meantime you must let me be your banker."

"My dear friend, you are too generous—you are the soul of nobility. But how can I ever repay——"

"It is I who am under obligation to you. Can I forget that if you hadn't made me work up my Thucydides to the highest point of perfection, those stony-hearted examiners would have inevitably ploughed me? And now let us go to the stage-door. Lucy—Miss Alford—must be ready by this time."

The young lady was waiting for them in the shadow of the dingy portal. The night was bright and clear, and for some little distance Mr. Desmond walked by his old tutor's side,

with Lucy's little hand on his arm. He wondered to find himself walking the obscure streets, through which Mr. Alford had mapped out a short-cut between the Oxford Road and Islington; he wondered still more to find Lucy's hand resting so lightly, and yet so confidingly, on his coat-sleeve; and, above all, he wondered that it should seem so pleasant to him to be quite out of his own world.

He walked about a mile, and then hailed a passing cab, and placed the young lady by her father's side. He had made one very painful discovery during the walk, and that was the fact that Tristram Alford had been drinking, and bore upon him the stamp of habitual drunkenness. This, then, was the cause of that gradual decadence which had attended the tutor's fortunes since the days at Henley. What a man to hold the fate of a daughter in his hand! What a helpless guardian for innocent girlhood! Mr. Desmond's heart ached as he thought of this.

"I may help them a little for the moment,"

he said, to himself, "but if this man is what I believe him to be, there can be no such thing as permanent help for him or for his daughter."

"I don't know how to thank you for your kindness to-night," Lucy said, as she shook hands with the editor.

"Indeed, you owe me no thanks. I only acted on the impulse of the moment. I was enraged by that woman's impertinence, and that man's sycophantic manner of treating her. Let me know if he makes any attempt to enforce your engagement. I don't think he will. When are you likely to go to Market Deeping?"

"On the thirtieth, I suppose. The theatre reopens on New-Year's day. Shall we—will papa—see you again before we go, Mr. Desmond?"

"Well, no; I fear my time—or—yes, you can breakfast with me some morning, can't you, Alford? Say the morning after Christmas Day. Come to my chambers at nine, if

that is not too early for you, and we can talk over Miss Alford's future."

Tristram Alford accepted this invitation with evident pleasure; but Laurence, whose hearing was very acute, heard the faintest sigh of disappointment escape the lips of Lucy, as he released her hand.

"Good-night," he said, cheerily; "and all success at Market Deeping! I shall hope to see you when you come back to town for your engagement at the Pall Mall."

And so they parted—Mr. Alford and his daughter to enjoy the novel luxury of a cab-ride; Laurence to walk all the way to the Temple, in an unusually thoughtful mood.

CHAPTER III.

MR. DESMOND TO THE RESCUE.

Laurence Desmond had received a whole packet of invitations to country-houses, where Christmas was to be kept with something of the traditional warmth and joviality, and with ample entertainment in the way of carpet-dances, and amateur concerts, and impromptu comedies in the style popular at that Italian theatre which was so dangerous a rival to the house of Molière. But to all such invitations Mr. Desmond had returned the same kind of answer. The laborious duties of the *Arcopagus* kept him prisoner in town, and would so keep him throughout the winter.

This was what the editor told his friends, but the fact was that Mr. Desmond dared not indulge any natural yearnings for jovial hunting-breakfasts, or private theatricals, or country

gatherings of pretty girls and hard-riding young men. He was bound to devote all Christmas leisure to the society of Mrs. Jerningham. The lady received her share of invitations from the chiefs of those very houses to which Mr. Desmond was bidden, but elected to refuse all.

"I do not care to be stared at and gossiped about, as if I were some kind of natural curiosity," she said, when she discussed the subject with her friend. "The men watch you with malicious grins whenever you are decently civil to me, and the women watch me with more intense malice whenever you talk to other women. There are times when we are compelled to walk upon red-hot ploughshares, and then, of course, *noblesse oblige*, we must tread the iron with a good grace. But I don't see why we should go out of our way to find the ploughshares."

"My dear Emily, you insist on looking at everything in this bitter spirit."

"I know the world in which I live."

"I think the world has been extremely gracious to you."

"Perhaps so; but the world has taken care to let me know that I am accepted on sufferance. Your position in literature, and Mr. Jerningham's fortune, sustain a platform for me, but it is a slippery platform at best. I am happier in my own house than anywhere else."

"But unhappily you are not happy in your own house."

"At any rate, I am less miserable."

Mr. Desmond shrugged his shoulders. He felt that his burden was growing heavier day by day, but he could not find it in his heart to be hard upon this beautiful woman, whose worst error was to love him with a jealous, suspicious love that made her own torment and his.

And by and by, when the demon of discontent had been exorcised, Mrs. Jerningham grew animated and gracious, and put on her sweetest smiles for the man she loved.

"You will spend Christmas Day with me, Laurence, will you not?" she pleaded. "I suppose I shall be honoured by your society on that day *at least?*"

The little, piteous air with which she uttered the last words, was scarcely justified by circumstances; since Mr. Desmond spent always one day, and sometimes two days a week at the Hampton villa.

So all the invitations were refused, and Laurence ate his Christmas dinner at River Lawn, where he met a second-rate literary celebrity and his wife, and an elderly magnate of the War Office, who had been a bosom-friend of Mrs. Jerningham's father. They were people whom he met very frequently at Hampton. He knew the literary gentleman's good stories by heart, and loathed them; he knew the bad stories of the War Office magnate, and loathed them with a still deeper aversion; indeed, there were different series of Castlereaghiana and Wellingtoniana, which inspired him with a wild desire to throw claret-jugs and other instruments of warfare at the head of the narrator. Mrs. Jerningham's circle grew narrower every day. The green-eyed monster held her in his fatal grip, and one by one she struck the best names

from her visiting-list. She did not care to invite very pretty women or very charming women; for every word or look of Laurence Desmond's was a sufficient cause for doubt and terror in her diseased imagination. She was jealous even of very agreeable men, if they absorbed too much of the editor's attention. She condemned him to dulness, and yet upbraided him because he was not gay.

"I fear you have not enjoyed your evening, Laurence," she said, as he lingered for a few minutes' confidential talk before hurrying off to catch the last train for London.

"I have enjoyed my little snatches of talk with you," he answered, mildly; "but I am getting rather tired of Stapleton, and your old friend's Wellington stories are almost too much for human endurance."

"How do you like Mrs. Stapleton?"

"I have told you at least a dozen times. She is neither particularly pretty nor particularly amusing. She gave me some very interesting details about her elder boy's experiences

in the way of whooping-cough, and the trouble she has with her cook. How is it I never see your friends the Westcombes? He is a very nice fellow, and Mrs. Westcombe a most delightful little woman."

"You think her pretty?"

"Amazingly pretty, in the soubrette style. You used to admire her so much."

"I think it was you who admired her so much," answered Mrs. Jerningham, with suppressed acrimony.

"I only echoed your sentiments. Have you quarrelled with her?"

"I am not in the habit of quarrelling with my acquaintance."

"No; but you have a knack of dropping them. Your house used to be the pleasantest in England."

"And it has ceased to be so because Mrs. Westcombe has ceased to visit me? If I cannot make my house pleasant to you myself, I will not ask you to come to it."

"Your house is always pleasant to me when

I find you and Mrs. Colton alone; but even you cannot make dull people agreeable. If you invite people for my pleasure, you should choose those I like."

"Very well, Monsieur le Soudain, in future I will send you my visiting-list."

"You are always unjust, Emily. You cross-question me, and then object to my candour."

Although Mr. Desmond was accustomed to relate almost all the details of his existence for the amusement of Mrs. Jerningham, he had refrained from telling her his experiences at the Oxford Road Theatre, or his renewal of an old friendship with Tristram Alford. Experience was fast teaching him a reticence that was the next thing to hypocrisy. It would have been very pleasant to him to tell the lady of River Lawn the story of Lucy Alford's trials and aspirations; but he had an ever-present terror of awakening that slumbering monster, always lurking in the deeps of Emily Jerningham's

mind. He knew that to speak of Lucy would bring upon him a sharp interrogation; and he shrunk from the idea of a possible scene which might arise out of the mention of that damsel's name.

He expected Mr. Alford to breakfast on the morning after that uncongenial evening at Hampton, and had taken care that a tempting meal should be prepared for the dweller on the heights of Ball's Pond. He waited breakfast for more than an hour, and only gave his visitor up when his own engagements obliged him to drink his tea and eat his dry toast with business-like haste, while the kippered salmon and devilled kidneys remained neglected in their hot-water dishes on a stand by the fire.

"I suppose poor old Tristram has forgotten our engagement," he said to himself, as he began his morning's work; "I should like to have seen him, in order to have some talk with him about that poor little girl's prospects; and yet what good can I hope to achieve for her, if the

father is a drunkard? Nothing else could have brought him so low: for he had an excellent position when I knew him twelve years ago. Even then Waldon and I suspected his attachment to the brandy-bottle. He was so fond of recommending brandy and cold water as the remedy for every disease common to mortality. And now it has come from brandy to gin—which indicates a decadence of a hundred per cent. in his social status. Poor girl! she is such a pretty, winning, childlike creature, and of that sympathetic nature which is so susceptible to all suffering."

Neither letter nor message of apology or explanation came from Mr. Alford during that day, but very late at night came a mysterious boy, with a damp and dirty-looking missive from the learned Tristram. Mr. Alford was one of those people whose letters usually arrive late at night; so Laurence was in nowise disconcerted when his man informed him that a boy had brought this damp epistle, and was waiting for an answer.

"Has the letter come from Islington by

hand?" asked Laurence, surprised that the needy tutor should have preferred to employ the expensive luxury of a messenger to the cheap convenience of a postage-stamp.

The major-domo departed to question the boy, and returned to tell his master that the letter had not come from Islington, but from Whitecross Street.

That fatal name explained all. Mr. Desmond tore open the flabby envelope, and read the following epistle, in the penmanship whereof was ample evidence of the flurry and distraction of mind incident upon a first night in bondage.

"My dear Desmond,—The sword of Damocles has been long suspended above my unhappy head. This morning the hair snapped, and a writ issued by a butcher at Henley, who enjoyed my custom for many years, but whose later accounts I have been unable to discharge, has brought me to this place. The necessity for the step which I am about to take has long been obvious; but I have hoped against hope,

and struggled on bravely, with the idea of making some kind of compromise with my old Henley creditors. I now feel that this desire is vain :

'Longa via est, nec tempora longa supersunt.'

"I am too old to accomplish the Sisyphean labour of paying debts which seem to spring from the very earth, like the armed antagonists of Cadmus. I have resolved, therefore, to endure that shame which worthier men than I have suffered. I must avail myself of the protection which the law affords to honest poverty; and with this view I have sent for a solicitor versed in this kind of practice, and have made arrangements for placing my petition on the file.

"I am told by one of my fellow-prisoners that the small amount of my debts will in all likelihood be a hindrance to my release. If my liabilities were of a colossal character, their extinction would be a mere affair of accountancy, and I might enjoy the mildness of a winter in the south of France while my lawyers arranged an agreeable settlement in

Walbrook, and might return in the spring to make my bow before the commissioner, and to be complimented on the excellence of my bookkeeping. But for the man who owes a few paltry hundreds are reserved the extreme rigours of the law; and I am advised to prepare myself for much harassing delay before I obtain my protection and can once more walk at liberty among my fellow-men.

"This, for myself, I could bear with stoical fortitude; but what is my child to do while I am detained in this wretched place? The old Queen's Bench gave a hospitable shelter to the prisoner, and afforded a comfortable home for his family; but here stern warders refuse me the privilege of my daughter's company, nor could I bring her even for an hour into a common ward where she would be, in all probability, the subject of rude remark or insolent observation. The poor child is yet in ignorance of my incarceration. I left her upon a pretence of business in the City, intending to inform her by letter of my whereabouts; but now the

night has come, I have not courage to write that letter; and in my dilemma I venture to appeal to you, the only friend on whose goodness I can count.

"Will you, my dear Desmond, call at Paul's Terrace early to-morrow morning, and tell my poor Lucy the reason of my non-appearance? If you will, at the same time, generously advance her a small sum for the payment of the account owing to Mrs. Wilkins, the landlady, and for the expenses of Lucy's journey to Market Deeping—which she must now take alone—you will confer a boon upon one who to his last hour will cherish the memory of your goodness. The cessation of even Mr. de Mortemar's pitiful stipend has been felt by us.

"Pardon this long epistle from your distracted friend, "T. A.

"*White X Street Prison, nine o'clock.*"

"Alone, and her father in prison! Poor, ill-used girl!" exclaimed Laurence, as he finished

this letter. He had been thinking of her, with regret and compassion, more than once that day; but he had little known the utter misery of her position. She was quite alone, this girl, who was of an age to need all the protecting influences of home—alone in a shabby lodging; perhaps with vulgar, sordid people, who would use her harshly because of those unpaid bills alluded to so lightly by the captive of Whitecross Street.

"What a father!" mused Mr. Desmond. "He leaves his daughter, in ignorance of his fate, to suffer the tortures of suspense all day, and at night writes to ask me, a single man of something less than five-and-thirty years of age, to befriend and protect the poor, helpless girl. I am the only friend he has; and he can trust me, he says. How does he know that he can trust me? and what guarantee has he for my honour? Only the fact that I read with him twelve years ago, and have lent him money since that time. And on the strength of this he asks me to befriend his

daughter in her loneliness! If I were a scoundrel, he would have done the same. Indeed, how does he know that I am not a scoundrel? And this poor little girl must go through life with no better guardian; and the world is full of scoundrels."

Mr. Desmond looked at the dial on the low Belgian marble mantelpiece, where a lank and grim Mephistopheles, with peaked beard and pointed shoes, kept watch and ward over an ivy-mantled clock-tower. It was nearly eleven o'clock.

"I dare say she is sitting up, waiting for him, at this moment," Laurence said to himself. "Why should she be kept in suspense till to-morrow morning? It will be no more trouble to me to go up there to-night than to-morrow; and I can much better spare the time now. It would be actual cruelty to let that poor girl suffer twelve hours more of uncertainty and apprehension; for I dare say she loves this reprobate father of hers as fondly as it is the luck of such reprobates to be loved.

He is the kind of father who ruins himself and his children with the most affectionate intentions, and would perish rather than speak an unkind word to the child whose prospects he is destroying."

Upon this Mr. Desmond threw down his book, and went in quest of his hat and overcoat.

The streets were clear at this time, and a hansom carried Laurence Desmond to Paul's Terrace in half an hour. He saw the feeble light burning in the parlour-window as he stepped from the cab, and before he could knock, the door was opened, and a tremulous voice cried, "Papa, papa! Oh, thank God you have come!"

It was Lucy. She recognized Laurence in the next moment, and recoiled from him, with a faint shriek of horror.

"Something has happened to papa!" she cried, and then began to tremble violently.

"My dear Lucy—my dear girl, your father is well—quite well," Laurence exclaimed, eager

to relieve the terrified girl, whose chattering teeth revealed her agony of fear. He took her by the arm with gentle firmness, and led her into the parlour.

"It has been very wrong of your father to leave you ignorant of his whereabouts," he said; "but I am sure you will forgive him when you know the cause. He is quite well; but he is a prisoner in Whitecross Street, and is likely to remain there for a week or two. He had not courage to write to you the tidings of his troubles, and so sent me to tell you his misfortune."

"Poor, dear papa! Thank heaven he is well! You—you are not deceiving me, Mr. Desmond?" she said, suddenly, with the look of terror coming back to her pale, sad face; "my father is really well? The only trouble is the prison?"

"That is the only trouble."

"Then I can bear it very patiently," answered Lucy, with a plaintive resignation that seemed inexpressibly touching to Laurence.

"We have long known that trouble of that kind was inevitable. Poor, dear papa! It is a very uncomfortable place, is it not? He was in a prison on the other side of the Thames once, when I was a little girl, and poor mamma and I used to go and see him; and it seemed quite a pleasant place, like a large hotel. But even the prisons are wretched now, papa says. I may go and see him, may I not?"

"Yes; I believe you can be allowed to see him. But it is not a nice place for you to visit."

"I do not mind that in the least, if I may only see him. Can I go very early to-morrow? Papa will want linen, and razors, and things. Oh, why did he not send a messenger for a portmanteau? It would have been so much more comfortable for him to have his things ready for the morning."

"And he would have spared you many hours of anxiety," said Mr. Desmond, touched by the unselfishness of the girl, who in this hour of trouble had not one thought for herself. He

could not avoid making a comparison, as he reflected how Emily Jerningham, under the same circumstances, would have bewailed her own misery, and the horror and degradation of her position.

"She could suffer slow death at the stake, with a smile upon her splendid face, for pride's sake," that impertinent inward voice, which he was always trying to stifle, remarked, obtrusively; "but she has no idea of enduring patiently, as this girl endures, unconscious of her own suffering in her thoughtfulness for others. With Emily the virtues are different phases of egotism."

"Yes; I have been very wretched since two o'clock, when I expected papa to dinner," said Lucy; "but I feel almost happy now that I know he is well. Do you think the prison is a *very* uncomfortable place?"

"Well, I dare say it is rather a rough kind of lodging; but no doubt your father will contrive to make himself tolerably comfortable. It will not be for long, you know. He is

almost sure to get his protection in a week or two."

"Whose protection did you say," Lucy faltered, at a loss to understand this phrase.

"His own protection—an immunity from arrest—his liberty, in point of fact. It is only a technical term. But what will you do in the mean time? That is the question."

"I fear I shall have to leave town before poor papa gets his release. The Market Deeping theatre opens on New-Year's night; and I think I must go on the 28th at latest. They are going to do the burlesque of *Lucrezia Borgia*, and I am to play Gennaro."

"Gennaro?"

"Yes. The son, you know. I believe he gets poisoned, or something, at the end. I have to sing parodies on 'Sam Hall,' and the "Cat's-meat Man;' and I have to dance a—a —cellar-flap breakdown, I believe they call it. It is a very good part."

"Indeed! The 'cellar-flap breakdown,' and

'Sam Hall,' and the 'Cat's-meat Man,' constitute a very good part. I am sorry for the legitimate drama."

"Oh, of course it is not like Pauline or Julia," cried Lucy; "but as a burlesque part it is very good. And in the country one has to play burlesque, and farce, and everything."

"And for that I suppose your salary is only four or five pounds a week?"

"My salary at Market Deeping will be twenty-five shillings," Lucy answered, blushing.

Four or five pounds!—it was a salary which she had thought of sometimes in her dreams. She knew that there were people in London who actually had such salaries; but to her the sum seemed fabulous as the golden treasure of Raleigh's unknown lands may have seemed to his mutinous crew.

Mr. Desmond made no remark upon the smallness of this pitiful stipend, though the thought of it smote his heart with actual pain.

"Your father sent you some money," he said, not without embarrassment, "to carry on the housekeeping, and so on."

"Papa sent me money! You have seen him, then?" Lucy asked, eagerly.

"No—a messenger brought me his letter.

"And the money. Where could papa get money? I know he had none when he left home this morning; and he has no friend in the world but you. Ah, I understand, Mr. Desmond. It is your own money you are giving me; and you are so kind, so thoughtful, that you fear I should be pained by knowing how much we owe you. I am used to feel the weight of such obligations, and I have sometimes felt the burden very heavy; but with you it is different. Your kindness takes the sting out of the obligation; and—and it does not seem so deep a humiliation to accept your charity——"

Here the sweet, low voice trembled and broke down, and the tutor's daughter burst into tears.

"Lucy, my dear girl—my dearest Lucy—for God's sake don't do that," cried Laurence, overcome in a moment by the aspect of that half-averted face, which the girl vainly strove to cover with her hands. The water-drops trickled through those slender fingers. All day her heart had been well-nigh bursting with grief, and unhappily her fortitude must needs give way at this very inconvenient crisis.

Truly a pleasant situation for the editor of the *Areopagus*. Called upon, at a moment's notice, to play the part of comforter and benefactor to a pretty, sensitive girl of eighteen, whose father was in prison!

"If Emily Jerningham could see me now!" Mr. Desmond said to himself, involuntarily.

He had called Miss Alford his dear—nay, indeed, his dearest—Lucy; but it was in the same spirit of compassion that would have prompted him to address endearing epithets to the charwoman who cleaned his rooms, had he found that honest creature in bitter need of consolation. His conscience whispered no

word of reproof to him on that score; but he felt somehow that his position was a perilous one, though he wondered what the peril could be.

"Am I a fool or a reprobate, that I cannot befriend an innocent girl without some kind of danger to her or myself?" the inward voice demanded, angrily.

Miss Alford had recovered her composure by this time.

"I have been so unhappy all day, that your kindness quite overcame me," she said, quietly. "I hope you will forgive me for being so silly."

"Do not talk of my kindness," answered the editor, who seemed now the more embarrassed of the two. "It is a great pleasure to me to serve—your father. You must go to Lincolnshire on the 28th, the day after to-morrow. Shall you be obliged to travel alone?"

"Yes; but I am not at all afraid of travelling alone."

"Una was not afraid of the lion," Mr. Desmond murmured to himself, softly; and then

he added, aloud, "If you really wish to see your father to-morrow, I will take you to him."

"You are too kind; but I cannot consent to give you so much trouble. I don't at all mind going to the prison alone."

"No, no; you shall not do that. There might be all kinds of difficulty about getting admitted, and so on. I shall call for you at twelve o'clock to-morrow. You must let me play the part of your elder brother upon this occasion, or your father. I am almost old enough to stand in the latter position, you know."

At this Lucy blushed crimson; and the sight of that shy, blushing face sent a strange thrill to the heart of the editor. He bade her a hasty good-night and went back to his cab. The interview had only lasted ten minutes—though the cabman mulcted him of sixpence by and by on account of the delay—and the grim-visaged landlady, who stood lurking at the head of the kitchen-stairs, had no ground for complaint that the proprieties had been outraged.

He stopped to say a word or two to this grim-visaged individual.

"Mr. Alford is unavoidably detained out of town for a few days," he said. "I hope you will take care of his daughter during his absence."

"I hope my little account will be paid before Miss St. Halbings goes to Lincolnshire," answered the woman, sternly. "I've had a many theatricals from the 'Wells' in my parlours; though theatricals in general are parties I avides taking; but I never had any theatrical backward in his rent till Mr. St. Halbings came to me."

"Miss St. Albans can pay you to-night, if you please," replied the editor; "her father has sent her money for that purpose."

"Ho, indeed," cried the landlady, with a tone of satisfaction that was not without a shade of irony; "circumstances alters cases. I am glad to find that Miss St. Halbings has got so rich all of a suddent."

"She is rich enough to find new lodgings, if

you make these disagreeable to her," answered Laurence, angrily. There was an insolence about the woman's tone which made his blood boil.

Yet what could he do? It would have been very pleasant to him to horsewhip this grim-visaged landlady; but one of the perplexities of social existence lies in the fact that the opposite sexes cannot horsewhip each other. Mr. Desmond ground his teeth, and departed with a sentiment of anger against a universe in which such a girl as Lucy Alford was subject to the insolence of grim-visaged landladies.

CHAPTER IV.

A PERILOUS PROTEGEE.

Even the icy December blast, which buffeted Mr. Desmond, as his hansom descended the Islingtonian Mont Blanc, could not blow away his sense of impotent indignation against the Nemesis who had presided over the youth of Miss Alford. His slumbers were rendered restless by the thought of her wrongs; and the picture of a desolate girl, travelling alone through a bleak wintry landscape, was the first image that presented itself to his mind when he awoke.

He disposed of his breakfast in about ten minutes, and from nine to half-past eleven worked at his desk as even he rarely worked. For scarcely any one but a helpless girl, whose sorrows had enlisted all his sympathy, would

the editor of the *Areopagus* have sacrificed the noon of a business day. He glanced with a guilty look at a pile of proofs that lay unread amongst his chaos of papers, and then departed to keep his appointment with Lucy.

He took her to the prison, and was present during the interview between father and daughter. Lucy's tenderness and sweetness touched him to the heart. Never before had he seen such patience, such unselfish affection; never had he imagined so perfect a type of womanhood.

"And she will go to that country theatre, utterly friendless and alone, to sing the 'Cat's-meat Man,' and to dance a cellar-flap break-down," Mr. Desmond said to himself, as he stood in the background, watching this Grecian Daughter of Ball's Pond, who would have given her heart's best blood for the captive father, upon whose neck she hung so fondly.

"I would rather see her under the wheels of Juggernaut than dancing a cellar-flap break-

down," thought Mr. Desmond. And at this moment there arose in Laurence Desmond's mind a desperate resolution. He would do something—he knew not what, but something —to prevent any further dancing of cellar-flap breakdowns on the part of Miss Alford. During that brief interview of the preceding night his quick eye had noted a mysterious rose-coloured satin garment of the tunic family lying on a table beside a shabby little workbox and a paper of spangles, whereby he opined that Miss Alford had been sewing spangles upon this rose-coloured garment, and that it was to be worn by her in the character of Gennaro, together with a pair of little rose-coloured silk boots, very much the worse for wear, but laboriously darned, and renovated by spangles.

"She might surely be a nursery-governess—a companion to some kind elderly lady; anything would be better than the 'Cat's-meat Man,'" he said to himself; and, being prone to act with promptitude and decision in all the

affairs of life, he broke ground with Miss Alford immediately after leaving the prison. They had travelled from Islington in a cab; but as it was a fine clear day, and as Lucy seemed to consider walking no hardship, he offered her his arm, and began the homeward journey on foot. He wanted to talk seriously to her, undistracted by the rattle of a cab.

"Are you very fond of acting?" he began.

"Oh yes, Mr. Desmond; I love it dearly, when I play my own parts—Pauline and Julia—Juliet and Ophelia, you know."

"Yes; but there is so much hardship, so many discouragements."

"I do not mind either hardship or discouragement," the girl answered, bravely.

"Not now perhaps, while you are very young and very hopeful; but the day must come when——"

"Oh don't, please don't!" cried Lucy, piteously. "You are talking like Mrs. M'Grudder. 'Wait till you've been in the profession as long as I have, my dear,' she says, 'and then

you'll know what it is to be an actress. Look at me, and see where I am, after five-and-twenty years' slavery; and *I* had talent, when *I* began;' and she lays such an insulting emphasis on the 'I' and makes me feel utterly wretched for the rest of the evening, unless I get a little more applause than usual to give me courage. There is a chimney-sweep, a regular playgoer, at Market Deeping, who is said to be quite the king of the gallery—all the other gallery people form their opinion by his, you know; and I believe he likes me. He always gives me a reception."

"A reception?"

"Yes; he applauds me when I first come on;—that is a reception, you know; and a good reception puts one in spirits for the whole evening. The sweep cries 'Bravo,' or 'Brayvo' as *he* calls it, poor fellow; and then they all applaud."

Her face quite softened as she thought of the chimney-sweep, and Laurence Desmond watched her with a smile, half pitying, half

amused—she seemed such a childish creature, in her ignorant hopefulness, and dependence on the approbation of chimney-sweeps.

"I should be very sorry to seem as disagreeable to you as Mrs. M'Grudder does," he said, presently; "but I am very deeply interested in your career—for auld lang syne, you know—and I want to discuss your prospects seriously. I do not think the stage, as it is at present constituted, offers a brilliant prospect for any woman. Of course there are exceptional circumstances, and there is exceptional talent; but, unhappily, exceptional talent does not always win its reward unless favoured by exceptional circumstances. Your surroundings are against you, my dear Miss Alford. Your father's ignorance of the dramatic world, your own inexperience of any world except the world of books, must tell against you when you fight for precedence with people who have been born and bred at the side-scenes of a theatre. The prizes in the dramatic profession are very few, and the

blanks are the most worthless of all ciphers. And for the chance of winning one of these rare prizes you must stake so much. Even in these enlightened days, there are prejudiced people who hold in abhorrence the profession of Garrick and the Kembles, of Mrs. Pritchard and Mrs. Kean; and by and by, when you have failed, perhaps, to realize one of the bright hopes that sustain you now, and have entered upon some other career, malicious people will reproach you with your dramatic associations, and discredit the truth and purity of your nature, because you tried to support your father by the patient exercise of your talents and your industry. You see *I* know what the world is, Lucy, and know that it can be a very hard and bitter world; above all things, bitter for a woman whose youth is unguarded by any natural protector."

Miss Alford looked at him wonderingly. "I have papa," she said. "What other protector can I want?"

"Your papa loves you very fondly, I have

no doubt; but his circumstances do not enable him to——"

"You mean that he is poor?" Lucy interposed, a little wounded.

"No, it is not of his poverty I am thinking, but of his inexperience. In all matters relating to the profession you have chosen, your father is as inexperienced as yourself. He cannot help you, as other girls who aspire for dramatic success are helped by those about them."

"Yes, that is quite true," answered the girl, rather sadly; "but I hope to succeed in spite of that. And by and by, when I get a London engagement, and have a salary of three or four pounds a week, papa and I can live in nice lodgings, and be very happy."

"And you really like your theatrical life, with all its difficulties; even with its Mrs. M'Grudders?"

"I like it so much, that neither Mrs. M'Grudder nor you can discourage me," answered Lucy. "I know that you speak very

kindly, and that you are the best and most generous of friends; but I cannot tell you how it pains me to hear you run down the profession."

This was a difficulty which Mr. Desmond had never contemplated. In a moment of generous feeling, he had resolved to rescue this fair young flower from the foul atmosphere in which her freshness was fading, and, behold! the fair young flower rejoiced in that unwholesome atmosphere, and refused to be restored to loftier and purer regions. He would have snatched this brand from the burning, but the brand preferred to remain in Tophet. For the first time in his life, Mr. Desmond understood the nature of that midsummer madness which affects the ignorant aspirant for dramatic fame; for the first time he beheld what it was to be "stage-struck." If he had been talking to a young actress, familiar from the cradle with the mysteries of her art, she would have heartily coincided with his abuse of "the profession;" but Lucy

Alford was fresh from the little parlour at Henley, where she had rehearsed Shakspeare, Sheridan Knowles, and Bulwer Lytton, before the looking-glass, in a fever of poetic feeling, and she had all the amateur's fond, ignorant love of her art.

She knew that Mr. Desmond meant kindly by her, but she was cruelly affected by the tenor of his advice. "*Et tu, Brute,*" she said to herself, sadly. So many people had tortured and tormented her by their dismal croakings about the career she had chosen ; and now he, even he, the friend who had promised to help her, went over to the enemy, and spoke to her in the accents of M'Grudder. She had been very happy that morning as they drove to Whitecross Street—yes, actually happy—though the father she loved was languishing in captivity ; but her heart sank with a new despondency as she walked by Mr. Desmond's side after this serious conversation.

Was it all true that people had told her? she asked herself ; was there no such thing as

success possible for her, let her study never so diligently, and labour never so industriously? And then she thought of Mrs. Siddons, who appeared in London, young, beautiful, gifted, only to fail ignominiously, and then went quietly back to her provincial drudgery, and plodded on with inimitable patience, to return in due time and take the town by storm. It was from the consideration of this little history she was wont to obtain consolation when depressed by the advice of her acquaintance; but even this failed to console her to-day. Discouragement from Laurence Desmond seemed more depressing than from any one else. Was he not her kindest—nay, indeed, her only—friend, and could she doubt the sincerity of his counsel?

The tears gathered slowly in her downcast eyes as she walked silently by his side, thinking thus; but she contrived to brush those unbidden tears away, almost unseen by her companion. Almost, but not quite unseen. Laurence saw that she was depressed, and he had a faint

suspicion that she had been crying; and immediately his heart smote him, and he was angry with himself for the recklessness with which his rude hand had smitten down her airy castle.

"Poor little girl!" he said to himself, very sadly; "and she really thinks that she will be a great actress some day, and win her reward for all the patient drudgery of the present. Well, she must keep her day-dream, since it is so dear. Mine shall not be the hand to let in the common light of reason on her dream-world. But I am very sorry for her, notwithstanding."

And hereupon Mr. Desmond tried to cheer his companion with much pleasant and hopeful talk; and the innocent young face brightened, and the shy, blue eyes glanced up at him with a grateful look which went straight to his heart, whither, indeed, all this girl's unsophisticated words and looks seemed to go.

"She is born to melt the hearts of men," he said to himself; "a tender, Wordsworthian

creature—plaintive, and grateful, and confiding. She will make a very sweet Juliet, if she ever acquire dramatic tact and power; but I cannot endure the preliminary ordeal of the 'Cat's-meat Man.' Free-trade in the drama is no doubt a supreme good, but there are times when one sighs for the days of the patent theatres, when every provincial manager kept a Shakspearian school, and would have shrunk appalled from the idea of street-boy dances and street-boy songs."

Mr. Desmond and the young actress walked all the way from Whitecross Street to Paul's Terrace, and it seemed to Laurence quite a natural occurrence to be walking with the girl's shabby little glove upon his arm. He was quite conscious that she was poorly dressed, that her shawl would have been despised by the tawdry factory-girls they met near the Old Street Road; but he knew that she looked like a lady, in spite of her well-worn shawl, and he had no sense of shame in the companionship. He had never felt a more

unselfish regard than he felt for this girl; and during the visit to the prison he had decided upon taking a step, the desperation whereof he was by no means inclined to underrate. He had determined to obtain Emily Jerningham's friendship for Lucy Alford, if sympathy for any human creature could be awakened in that lady's heart and mind.

"I have never yet asked her a favour," he said to himself. "I will ask her to interest herself in this poor girl's fate. My friendship can serve Lucy Alford very little; but the friendship of a woman, an accomplished woman like Emily, who is in every way independent, may help to shape her future, and rescue her at once from 'cellar-flap breakdowns' and 'cat's-meat men.' Emily is always bewailing the emptiness of her life. It might be at once an amusement and a consolation to her to befriend this girl. I know it is a generous heart to which I shall make my appeal. The only question is, whether I can contrive to touch that heart with Lucy Alford's story."

Mr. Desmond only apprehended one difficulty in the matter, but that was rather a serious one. Might not Mrs. Jerningham—of late the victim of such morbid fancies, such frivolous suspicions—take it into her head to be jealous of this girl? and in that case there was an end to all hope for Lucy. Let the green-eyed monster show but the tip of his forked tail, and friendship between Mrs. Jerningham and Miss Alford would be an impossibility.

Reasoning upon the matter within himself, as he walked by Lucy's side, Laurence Desmond decided that jealousy in this case must needs be out of the question.

"No, no; she has been foolish and absurd enough in her fancies, Heaven knows; but here it is impossible. The girl is nearly twenty years younger than I am, and has nothing in common with me, or the world I live in."

After arguing with himself thus, Mr. Desmond decided that there was no possibility of any such feeling as jealousy upon Emily Jer-

ningham's part; and yet it seemed to him that it would be a desperate and awful thing to address the lady of River Lawn on the subject of Lucy Alford.

They arrived at Paul's Terrace while the editor was still meditating upon the young lady's future, and, indeed, before he had altogether decided upon what was best to be done on her behalf. An unexpected difficulty had arisen, in the girl's enthusiastic regard for her profession. It was quite out of the question that Mr. Desmond should introduce Lucy to Mrs. Jerningham while the girl still hankered after the triumphs of Market Deeping. All thought of "cellar-flap breakdowns," and "cat's-meat men," must be put away before Lucy could approach the wife of Harold Jerningham.

In this perplexity of mind, Mr. Desmond could not bring himself to bid Lucy Alford good-bye upon the threshold of No. 20, Paul's Terrace, as she evidently expected him to do. He lingered doubtfully for a minute or two, and then went into the parlour with her.

"I should like to have a few minutes' chat before I bid you good-bye," he said. "I suppose you really must go to-morrow?"

"Yes, to-morrow is the latest. It seems very dreadful to leave papa in that horrible dingy place; but he says it will be only for a few days. I ought to have been at Market Deeping on Monday, for the rehearsals. Mr. Bungrave is very particular."

"What time do you start?"

"At a quarter-past five."

"In the afternoon, I suppose?"

"Oh no, in the morning."

"At a quarter-past five on a December morning!" cried Laurence, with a shudder. "Isn't that a very inconvenient hour?"

"Yes, it is rather disagreeable to start before it is light, because cabmen are always so ill-tempered at that time in the morning. But the train goes at a quarter past five, and I must contrive to be at the station at five."

"*The* train?" repeated Laurence. "There

must be several trains for Lincolnshire in the course of the day."

"Oh yes, there are other trains; but, you see, that is the parliamentary train, and in the profession, people generally travel by the parliamentary train, because it is so much cheaper, you know, and it comes to the same thing in the end. One meets most respectable people, generally with large families of children and canary-birds; and sometimes people even play cards, if one can get something flat—a tea-tray, or a picture—to play on. One has to hide the cards, of course, when the guard comes round, unless he happens to be a very good-natured guard, who pretends not to see them. Oh, I assure you, it is not at all disagreeable to travel by the parliamentary train."

"Well, I can fancy there *might* be a combination of circumstances under which a journey to—say the Land's End—in the slowest of parliamentaries would be delightful," said the editor, looking at the girl's innocent, animated face with a very tender smile. "But I think

I could willingly forego the children and the canaries, and even the card-playing on a tea-tray. Suppose you go by the mid-day express, Lucy, upon this occasion, as the weather is cold, and you will be travelling alone? I will meet you at the station, and see to your ticket, and all that sort of thing; and then, when I have placed you in the care of the most indulgent guard who ever ignored card-playing on a tea-tray, I can go to Whitecross Street, and assure your father of your comfortable departure."

"You are too kind. I cannot accept so much kindness," murmured Lucy, to whom it was a very new thing to receive such evidence of disinterested friendship.

As she faltered her grateful acknowledgments, with a confusion of manner that was not without its charm, her eyes wandered to the chimney-piece, where there was a letter, directed in a sprawling, masculine hand.

"It is from the manager," she said, as she took the letter. "Perhaps to scold me for not

being at the theatre last Monday. Will you excuse me if I read it, Mr. Desmond?"

"I would excuse you if you read all the epistles of Pliny," said Laurence; and in the next moment would have cut his tongue out.

Lucy tore open her letter with nervous haste. The change in her countenance as she read, told Mr. Desmond that the missive brought her no good tidings.

"Is there anything amiss?" he asked.

"Oh, it is cruel, it is shameful!" cried the girl, indignantly. "Mr. Bungrave has given Gennaro to another lady, because I was not there for the rehearsal yesterday. Papa wrote to him to say when we were coming; and if he had telegraphed to say I must positively be there, I should have gone. And now I have lost my engagement, after studying my part so carefully, and altering my dress, and——"

Here the young lady stopped abruptly, and Laurence saw that it cost her no small effort to keep back her tears. She was very young,

and the fever of the amateur, the devotee of a beloved art, was strong upon her. Laurence perceived also her regretful glance in the direction of a little old-fashioned sofa, on which there lay, neatly folded, the rose-coloured satin garment he had seen the night before; and he felt that to be disappointed of the glory of appearing in this costume was a grief to her.

"I must confess that I am not sorry for this, Lucy," he said, earnestly. "I do not think there could have been any lasting triumph won by the 'Cat's-meat Man.'"

Miss St. Albans could not be brought all at once to see that the 'Cat's-meat Man' was an abomination.

"Gennaro is a beau-beau-tiful part," she said, struggling with her emotion; "it is full of good puns, and the parodies are splendid, and ——. If I had a regular written engagement, Mr. Bungrave couldn't treat me so; but there was only a verbal understanding between him and papa. I dare say it is all Mr. de Mortemar's doing, because of my leaving the Oxford

Road Theatre. Mr. de Mortemar can do anything at Market Deeping; he is such an immense favourite."

"Indeed!" said Laurence, on whose editorial ear the "immense favourite" grated unpleasantly; "and it is my fault that you offended Mr. de Mortemar—my fault, my very great fault. But do you know, Lucy, that I cannot bring myself to be sufficiently sorry for what I have done. You see I feel a very real interest in your career; and I do not think your Market Deeping experience could be of any actual benefit to you. I admit that you must arrive at Drury Lane and Juliet by easy stages; but I cannot see why you should begin by dancing silly dances, and singing still more silly songs. In March Mr. Hartstone will give you an engagement at the Pall Mall; and in the meantime your father will get through his difficulties, and you will have leisure for the study of your beloved art."

"Yes," answered Lucy, consoled but not elated, "I shall study with all my might. Oh,

Mr. Desmond, what would become of us if your kindness had not secured me a London engagement!"

She was thinking sadly enough of the bitter shifts to which she and her father must needs be driven for want of the pittance that would have rewarded her labours at the little country theatre; and then, at Market Deeping lodgings and provisions were very cheap, and in London everything was so dear. The kindness and generosity of Mr. Desmond seemed boundless; but there must be some limit to their acceptance of such help. They could not go on living upon this gentleman's charity.

Laurence saw her despondency, and had some idea of the cares that troubled her. He could find no way of telling her that the dread spectre Poverty was a shadow she need fear no longer, since he was ready to place his purse at her disposal until—until when? Well, she would have a salary from the lessee of the Pall Mall in March; and then, of course, he need be Tristram Alford's banker no longer; and, in

the meantime, what would his kindness cost him?—a ten-pound note now and then—a ten-pound note, which would be better bestowed thus than lost at a club-house whist-table, or squandered at a sale of books or bric-à-brac.

"You must try to make yourself happy while your father is under a cloud, Lucy," he said, cheerily. "Rely upon it he will weather the storm, and right himself speedily. I will answer for that. In the interim, it will be rather dreary for you in these lodgings, I dare say; and I should much like to introduce you to a lady, a friend of mine."

"I—I am sure you are very kind," faltered Lucy; "and I shall be pleased to know any lady whom you like. Is she a relation of yours, Mr. Desmond?"

"No, not a relation, but a friend of many years' standing. Her father and my father were very intimate; in fact, I have known her a long time. I think she was as young as you, Lucy, when I first knew her."

His thoughts went back to the little garden

at Passy, the white wall, and scarlet blossoms bright against the deep blue sky, and Emily Jerningham in all the glory of her girlhood. Well, those days were gone, and, unhappily, the Emily and Laurence of those days had vanished with them.

"She is not young now, then, the lady?" Lucy asked, with an interest that was a little warmer than the occasion warranted.

"Well, she is not what you would call young. I believe she is nearly thirty; and that to a young lady of eighteen seems a venerable age, no doubt. She is a very agreeable woman, generous-minded, and refined"—Laurence felt a little twinge of conscience as he remembered certain occasions upon which the lady in question had not shown herself so very generous-minded—"and I am sure her friendship would be a source of happiness for you."

"It is very good of you to think of this. It will be a pleasure to me to know any friend of yours; but—but—I am so unused to society; and while poor papa is in that dreadful place,

I think I would rather not see any stranger, please, Mr. Desmond."

"Very well, we will see about it. If Mrs. Jerningham should call upon you some morning, you will not refuse to see her?"

"Mrs. Jerningham!" repeated Lucy; "she is a married lady, then?"

"Yes, she is married. Her husband is rather an eccentric person—a great traveller; so she lives by herself, in a very charming house near Hampton Court."

"Indeed!" said Lucy, with a little sigh that sounded rather like a sigh of relief; and then she repeated her protestations of gratitude, which this time seemed less constrained.

After this, Mr. Desmond had nothing more to do than to say good-bye.

"I should recommend you not to go to Whitecross Street again," he said, at parting. "It is an unpleasant place for you to visit alone; and your father will soon get his release. If my time were less engaged, I should be happy to take you there again; but I am

too busy for friendship. Good-bye. I dare say you will see Mrs. Jerningham before long. You can be as frank with her as you are with me; but I am sure there is no occasion to tell you that, for it is your nature to be truthful and confiding. Once more, good-bye."

He pressed the little hand kindly, and departed. He felt that he had conducted himself in an eminently paternal manner, and it seemed to him that the sentiment of paternal regard had a strange sweetness—a sweetness that was not all sweet.

CHAPTER V.

OUT OF THE WORLD.

The arrival of Harold Jerningham disturbed the even tenor of life at the bailiff's cottage, albeit he earnestly entreated there might be no change in his old friend's existence. Theodore de Bergerac's notion of hospitality was Arabian; and he would have slaughtered his daughter's favourite Newfoundland if Mr. Jerningham had hinted an eccentric desire for *pâté de foie de chien*. He altered his dinner-hour from three o'clock to seven, in accordance with the habits of his guest; and he took pains to order such refined and delicate repasts as might have been chosen by a Lucullus in reduced circumstances. His cook was an old Frenchwoman, who had lived with him ever since he had occupied a house of his own; and for a *vol-au-vent*, an omelette

aux fines herbes, a cup of coffee, or a batch of pistolets, white as snow and light as thistle-down, old Nanon was prepared to enter herself in a *concours* of the universe.

"Ne vous dérangez, donc pas, petite amour," she said to Helen, when that young lady expressed some misgiving on the subject of Mr. Jerningham's dinners; "nous avons toujours les vaches et les poulets; avec ça on a de quoi servir un diner au lor maire. Et puis pour le café: n'est-ce pas que je l'ai fait pour madame la mère de monsieur dans le temps? C'était elle qui disait toujours, 'Il n'y a que Nanon qui fait le café comme ça;' et puis elle se meurt, la bonne dame, et puis il y avait la révolution, et monsieur me dit, 'Nanon, adieu, je m'en vais;' et puis j'ai tant pleuré, et puis——"

There was no end to Nanon's "et puis."

"C'est une espèce de puits qui n'a point de fond," said M. de Bergerac, when his daughter repeated to him some of the old woman's affectionate twaddlings.

It was some years since Mr. Jerningham had

been to Greenlands, and in the past his visits had been of the briefest.

"Thou art always as one that falls from the heavens," said M. de Bergerac.

This time, however, it seemed as if the restless demon that ruled Harold Jerningham's existence was in some manner exorcised. The master of Greenlands took up his abode in those snug bachelor rooms on the ground-floor of the mansion, which he preferred to the statelier apartments above. There had crept upon the old house a silence and solemnity almost as profound as the mystic silence which reigned in the palace of the Sleeping Beauty, and not even the coming of the master could break the awful spell. By night and by day the doors shut with a clang that might have sounded in the Castle of Udolpho. The catacombs of subterranean Rome are more cheerful than the great stone entrance-hall; the chamber in which Frederick Barbarossa sat in a charmed sleep, awaiting the summons that was to call him once again to the battle-field, was not more

appalling than the great dining-room, where the shutters were seldom opened, and where the pictured images of departed Jerninghams looked ghostlike in the gloom.

It was only natural, therefore, that Mr. Jerningham should prefer the pleasant, home-like rooms in the bailiff's cottage. Considered as a habitation only, the cottage was much more pleasant than the great house; and at the cottage Mr. Jerningham enjoyed the society that was of all companionship most agreeable to him. With Theodore de Bergerac there was always some new subject for discussion; and the theme which employed the quiet days of the *savant* had a keen interest for his friend. The Frenchman might ride his hobby as hard as he pleased without inflicting weariness upon Mr. Jerningham, who in general society affected the tone and manner of a gentlemanly martyr.

He spent all his evenings at the cottage, after contriving to occupy himself somehow or other during the day; for this most selfish of men was too well-bred to intrude upon his

friend's studious hours. It was only between six and seven o'clock that Mr. Jerningham made his appearance in the little drawing-room, where he generally found Helen alone with her books and work, with the ponderous limbs of the Newfoundland stretched luxuriously upon the hearth at her feet.

The half-hour before dinner was by no means disagreeable to the master of Greenlands, nor was it unpleasant to Helen. Jerningham the irresistible had not lost the charm of manner that had won him renown in that modern Hôtel de Rambouillet, to whose saloons all that was brightest in the regions of intellect lent its light; and across whose floors, silent and inscrutable as a shadow, passed that exiled prince whose voice now rules the Western world. Mr. Jerningham had acquired the art of conversation amongst the best men of his day, and he talked well. Subdued in all things, he pleased without effort, and was instructive without taint of dogmatism. He discussed a subject with interest, but he never argued. That war of

words which some people call conversation was detestable to him.

Helen was unversed in the hateful art of argument, and she was the most delightful, the most sympathetic of listeners. She had read just enough to make her a good listener. There were few subjects you could touch of which she did not know something, and about which she did not languish to know more. She was not unpleasantly demonstrative of her interest in your discourse, nor did she cut you down in the middle of a sentence from the desire to prove herself your equal in wisdom; but every now and then, by some apposite remark or well-timed question, she demonstrated her interest in your discourse, her perfect appreciation of your meaning.

"If my wife had been like this girl, my marriage would have been a turning-point in my life," Harold Jerningham said to himself, very sadly, after one of these pleasant half-hours before dinner.

After that first interview between the two

men, no more was said about Eustace Thorburn. To the secretary, Mr. Jerningham was unalterably polite, preserving always that tone of the grand seigneur which marks difference of rank, and yet is not the assumption of superiority; a manner that seems to say, "We are born of different races, and, unhappily, no condescension on my part can bring us any nearer to each other." It was the manner of Louis the Great to Molière or Racine. But a very close observer might have discovered that the master of Greenlands liked neither the secretary's presence nor the secretary himself. He talked to him a little now and then; for he was at his worst a gentleman, and could not insult a dependant; and he listened courteously to the young man's talk. But he rarely pursued any subject that seemed a favourite with Mr. Thorburn; and on rare occasions when Eustace warmed with the excitement of some argument between himself and his employer, and talked with unusual warmth, Mr. Jerningham betrayed some slight weariness.

"Do you not find that young man insufferable with his rhapsodies about Homer and Æschylus?" he said to Helen one evening. But the young lady declared her sympathies with Mr. Thorburn, and this time without blushes or confusion whatsoever.

There is a calm, sweet peace that attends the monotony of a happy life, in which doubt and bewilderment of mind are unknown. On that first day of Mr. Jerningham's return, Helen had been just a little embarrassed in her conversation with the unexpected guest; hence the blushes and confusion that had accompanied her mention of Eustace Thorburn. But now she had no more restraint in talking of the secretary with Mr. Jerningham than when she talked of him with her father. Harold saw this, and began to fancy that he had been mistaken. There might be no love-affair between these young people after all. He was very willing to think it was so. "I should be sorry to see Helen de Bergerac waste her regard upon that pedantic young prig," he said to himself.

Now most assuredly Eustace Thorburn was neither prig nor pedant; but in his own tranquil manner Mr. Jerningham was a good hater, and he had taken it into his head to hate this young man. The prejudice was, perhaps, not entirely unnatural, since Eustace was in some manner a protégé of Laurence Desmond's.

Happily for the secretary, this unprovoked dislike was yet unknown to him. He was no sycophant, to languish for a rich man's friendship; and he had never studied Mr. Jerningham's looks or tones so closely as to discover the state of that gentleman's feelings. There was, indeed, no room in his mind for any consideration of Mr. Jerningham's thoughts or feelings. He was a poet, and he was in love, and he was happy; happy, in spite of the lurking consciousness that there might come a sudden end to his happiness.

Yes, he was happy—calmly, completely happy; and it is just possible that this very fact was irritating to Mr. Jerningham, who was a creature of whims and fancies, capricious and

exacting as a woman. Had he not lived a womanish, self-indulgent life, eminently calculated to render the best and bravest of men something less than manly? Mr. Jerningham had chosen his position in life, and had never outstepped it. In the great opera of existence he had played only one part, and that was the *rôle* of the lover—the false, the fickle, the devoted, the disdainful, the jealous, the exacting—what you will—but always the same part in the same familiar drama; and now that he was too old for the character, he felt that he had no further use in life, and that for him the universe must henceforward be a blank.

He felt this always, but never with a pang so keen as that which smote him when Eustace Thorburn's freshness and enthusiasm marked the depth of his own gentlemanly hopelessness. For the last fifteen years of his life he had kept himself carefully aloof from young men, holding the youth of his generation as an inferior species, something lower than his dog, infinitely

worse than his horse. He saw young men from afar off at his club, and on those rare occasions when he condescended to appear in society, and it seemed to him that they were all alike, and all equally inane. The only clever young men he had ever met were older in feeling than himself, and more wicked, with the wickedness of the Orleans regency as distinguished from the wickedness of the Augustan age, it followed—the decadence from a Lauzun to a Riom, from the stately saloons of Versailles to the *luxe effréné* of the Palais Royal.

But, behold, here was a young man who was intellectual and not cynical, learned and not a scoffer, ambitious without conceit, enthusiastic without pretence. Here was a young man whom Harold Jerningham admired in spite of himself, and whose virtues and graces inspired in his breast a feeling that was terribly like envy.

"Is it his happiness or his youth that I envy him?" Mr. Jerningham asked himself, when he tried to solve the mystery of his own sentiments with regard to this matter. "His

youth surely; for the other word is only a synonym for youth. Yes, if I am angry with his obtrusive brightness and hopefulness, I suppose it is because I see him in full possession of that universal heritage which I have wasted. He is young, and life is all before him. How will he spend his ten talents, I wonder? Will he turn them into small change, and squander them in fashionable drawing-rooms, as I squandered mine? or will he invest them in some grand undertaking where they will carry interest till the end of time? Helen tells me he is to be a poet. I have seen his lighted window shining between the bare black branches when I have been restless, and prowled in the park after midnight. Ah, what delight to be three-and-twenty, with a spotless name, a clear conscience, a good digestion, and to be able to sit up late on a winter's night to scribble verses! I dare say his fire goes out sometimes, and he writes on, supremely unconscious of the cold, and fancying himself Homer. Happy youth!"

A perfectly idle man is naturally the subject of strange whims and caprices; for that saying of Dr. Watts, about the work that Satan supplies to the idle, is as true as if it had been composed by Plato or Seneca. It must surely have been from very *désœuvrement* that Mr. Jerningham wasted so much of his life at the cottage, and devoted so much of his leisure to the study of Eustace Thorburn as a member of the human family, and Eustace Thorburn in his relation to the student's daughter. Certain it is that he bestowed as much of his attention upon the affairs of these young people as he could well have done had he been the appointed guardian of Helen de Bergerac's peace. Closely as he studied these young persons, he could not arrive at any definite conclusion about them. Helen's bright, changeful face told so many different stories; and the countenance of the secretary was almost as bright and changeful.

Sweet though the charms of friendship must always be to the jaded spirit, Mr. Jerningham

was not altogether happy in his intercourse with the family at the bailiff's cottage. He found pleasure there, and he dallied with the brief glimpses of happiness, loth to lose the brightness of those transient rays; but he found pain far keener than the pleasure, and every day when he went to his old friend's house he told himself this visit should be the last.

But when the next day came, the outlook over life's desert seemed more than ever dark and dreary; so he lingered a little longer by the cool waters of the green oasis.

CHAPTER VI.

MRS. JERNINGHAM IS PHILANTHROPIC.

Mr. Desmond took the earliest opportunity of carrying out his resolution in the matter of Lucy Alford, otherwise Miss St. Albans. He dined at the Hampton villa within a few days of his visit to Whitecross Street, and entertained Mrs. Jerningham with the story of his tutor's daughter, her hopes and her struggles. He told the simple little story very pleasantly, and not without a touch of pathos, as he sat by the pretty fireplace in the Hampton drawing-room, after a New Year's dinner *à trois* with Mrs. Colton and her niece. The dinner had been a success, the snug circular table crowned with a monster pine of Emily's own growing; and the châtelaine herself was in a peculiarly amiable mood.

The most delightful of dragons had a habit

of dozing after dinner, which was just a little hazardous for the fruit under her guardianship.

She always awoke from her slumbers to declare that she had heard every word of the conversation, and had enjoyed it amazingly; but this declaration was taken with certain qualifications. Seated in her comfortable nook by the low Belgian mantelpiece, half in the shadow of the projecting marble, half in the red light of the fire, she was at once the image of repose and propriety—a statue of Comfort, draped in that neutral-tinted silk which is the privilege of middle age.

"Why do you ever ask stupid people to meet me, Emily?" asked Laurence, when he had finished Lucy Alford's story. "See how happy we are alone together. It is so nice to be able to talk to you *sans gêne*, with the sense that one is really holding converse with one's best and truest friend."

Mrs. Jerningham's flexible lips were slightly contracted as Laurence said this. His tone

was just a little *too* friendly to be pleasing to her.

"You are very good," she said, rather coldly, "and I am delighted to find you think my house pleasant this evening. Is your Miss Alford pretty?"

"No, 'my Miss Alford' is not particularly pretty," replied the editor, conscious that the green-eyed monster was not entirely banished from that comfortable paradise; "at least, I suppose not. She is the sort of girl who is usually called interesting. I remember a young man who called all the beauties of the season 'pleasing.' His vocabulary contained no warmer epithet. They were all pleasing. I think, without going too far, I may venture to call Miss Alford pleasing."

"She is young, of course?"

"A mere child."

"Indeed! a mere child, like Göthe's Mignon or Hugo's Esmeralda, I suppose?"

This was a very palpable pat from the paw of the green-eyed one; but Mr. Desmond had

set his foot upon the ploughshare, and he was not inclined to withdraw from the ordeal, because the iron proved a little hotter than he had expected to find it.

"She is not in the least like Mignon. She is a very sensible, reasonable young lady, about eighteen years of age. Now, I know that you are dreadfully at a loss for some object upon which to bestow your sympathy, and it has struck me that, with very little trouble to yourself, you might confer much kindness on this friendless girl. She is of gentle blood, of refined rearing; and she is quite alone in the world; for I count her broken-down, drunken father as less than nothing. She is all innocence, gratitude, and affection; and——"

"Indeed!" exclaimed Mrs. Jerningham. "You appear to have studied her character with considerable attention."

"She is as simple as a child, and reveals her character in half a dozen sentences. Go and see her, Emily; and if you are not pleased and interested, let your first visit be your last."

"And if I should be pleased and interested, what then?"

"Your own heart will answer that question. The girl is a lady, exposed to all the miseries of genteel poverty, disappointed of one theatrical engagement, and not likely to be professionally employed for some months. I think your first impulse will be to bring her home with you. Her youth is fast fading in her miserable home, where there is so much anxiety, so little happiness. You have lamented the emptiness of your life, your inability to be of use to your fellow-creatures——"

"Excuse me, Mr. Desmond, I told you very plainly that I have no taste for philanthropy."

"And I took the liberty to disbelieve you. I am sure you do yourself injustice when you pretend not to be kind and womanly."

"And am I to go about the world adopting casual orphans, or any amiable young persons who happen to be afflicted with disreputable fathers, in order to gratify the charitable instincts of Mr. Desmond, whose last mania is

the rescue of pretty actresses from the anxieties and discomforts of their profession?"

"You will do just as you please, Emily," Laurence answered, very coldly. "I thought the history of this girl's trials would have interested you. I might have known that you would receive it in your usual spirit."

"And pray what is my usual spirit?"

"A very unpleasant one!"

"Indeed! I am a most objectionable person because I do not rush to the rescue of Miss Lucy Alford, whom you talk of, by the way, as Lucy, *tout court*. Shall I order the brougham, and go in search of your paragon, to-night."

Mrs. Jerningham extended her hand, and made as if she would ring the bell. Mrs. Colton's slumbers were broken by a faint moaning sound, as of remonstrance.

"I shall never again mention the name of my paragon, Mrs. Jerningham," said Laurence, rising and planting himself with his back to the fireplace; "nor will I ever again ask the

smallest favour at your hands. You have a positive genius for aggravation!"

"Thank you very much. It is not given to every one to be so charming as Miss Alford."

"Good night, Mrs. Colton," said Laurence, as the image of the proprieties awoke to life, conscious that the atmosphere had changed since she sank to her peaceful slumbers. "I have a little work to do to-night, and must get back to town early."

This awful threat brought Mrs. Jerningham's proud spirit to the dust immediately.

"Oh no, you are not going away!" she exclaimed. "Aunt Fanny is just going to give us some tea—why are those people always so long bringing the tea?—and after tea you shall have as much music as you like, or none, if you like that better. I will go and see your tutor's daughter to-morrow morning, Laurence; and if Aunt Fanny and I find her a nice person—nice in the feminine sense of the adjective, *bien entendu*—we will bring her down to stay with us for a few weeks."

After this, there was perfect harmony for the rest of the evening. No one could be more gentle, more humble, more charming than Mrs. Jerningham, after she had goaded the man she loved to the verge of madness; but so to goad him was a delight that she could not forego.

Early in the next afternoon the simple inhabitants of Paul's Terrace were electrified by the apparition of a brougham and pair—a brougham, on the box whereof sat two servants, clad in subdued and unexceptional livery—a brougham which even the untutored denizens of Ball's Pond recognized as the very archetype of equipages. A tremendous knock at the door of No. 20 set Lucy's heart beating; a pompous voice asked if Miss Alford was at home; and in the next minute the door of the brougham was opened, and two ladies alighted—ladies whose furs were alone worth a fortune, as the proprietress of No. 20 informed her gossips at the first opportunity.

Lucy's heart fluttered like some frightened bird, as Mrs. Jerningham advanced to greet her,

with outstretched hand and pleasant smile. It was long since she had been accustomed to any but the free-and-easy society of the green-room, where the ladies called her "St. Albans," and the gentlemen "my dear," in no impertinent spirit, but with a fatherly familiarity which had, at first, rather amazed her.

Mrs. Jerningham's carriage, and sables, and elegance, and beauty, were alike startling to her; and this handsome lady was Mr. Desmond's friend! The world in which he lived was inhabited by such people! Oh, what a vulgar, miserable place Paul's Terrace must have seemed to him! what a loathsome den the prison in which her father languished, broken-down and desolate! The ex-coach was drinking brandy and water, and maundering about great "wines," and patrician bear-fights—the battles of Ursa Major—in the prison-ward, as the girl thought of him, and was enjoying life very tolerably after his old fashion.

"Our common friend Mr. Desmond has sent me to call upon you, Miss Alford," said the

lady in sables, with much cordiality of tone and manner, and with Lucy's timid hand in her own. "We are to be excellent friends, he tells me; and he has given me such an interesting account of your professional career, and your love for the drama, that I feel already as if I knew you quite intimately. I hope I do not seem altogether a stranger to you."

"Oh no, indeed," faltered Lucy. "Mr. Desmond told me how kind you are; and I am sure——"

This was all that Miss Alford was capable of saying just yet. Mrs. Jerningham had noted every detail of her appearance by this time, with some touch of that fatal spirit whose influence embittered so much of her life.

"Yes, she is interesting," thought the visitor, "and not exactly pretty; and yet I am not quite convinced of that. Her eyes are large and blue, and have a tender, earnest look, that is assumed, no doubt, like the rest of her stage-tricks; and, I declare, the minx has long black eyelashes. I wonder whether

she has dyed them? That rosy little mouth is painted, no doubt, in order to set off her pale complexion, which of course is pearl-powder, so artfully put on that one cannot see it. No doubt these actresses have a hundred secrets of the Rachel kind."

Thus whispered jealousy; and then spoke the milder voice of womanly compassion.

"That brown merino dress is dreadfully shabby, almost threadbare about the sleeves; and what a horrible place to live in, with children playing on the door-step, and fowls—actually fowls!—in the area. Poor little thing! she really seems like a lady—shy and gentle, and alarmed by our grandeur."

The voice of compassion drowned the green-eyed one's insidious whisper, and in a very few minutes Mrs. Jerningham had contrived to set Lucy at her ease. She made Miss Alford talk of herself, and her hopes and disappointments, in discoursing whereof Lucy was careful to avoid all mention of the "Cat's-meat Man."

"I want you to come and stay a few days

with me at Hampton, Miss Alford," said Emily. "You are not looking at all well, and our nice country air will revive you after all your worries.—A week at Hampton would quite set Miss Alford up in the matter of health, wouldn't it, Aunt Fanny?"

On this Mrs. Colton, of course, seconded her niece's proposal; but Lucy was evidently at a loss to reply to this flattering invitation.

"It would be most delightful," she murmured. "I cannot thank you sufficiently for your kindness. But I think while papa is—away—I ought not to——"

And here she looked down at her threadbare merino dress, and Mrs. Jerningham divined that there lay the obstacle.

"I shall take no refusal," she said; while Lucy was wondering whether she could enter society in the pink silk she wore for the second act of the *Lady of Lyons*, or the blue moiré antique—a deceitful and spurious fabric with a cotton back—which she wore for Julia in the *Hunchback*. "I have pledged myself to

carry you off to Hampton, and I must keep my word. I will not wait for any preparations in the way of toilette; you must come in the dress you have on, and my maid shall run you up two or three dresses to wear while you are with me. I have a mania for buying bargains, and I have always half a dozen unmade dresses in my wardrobe. It will be a real charity to take them off my hands, and leave me free to buy more bargains. I never can resist that insidious man who assails me, just as I have finished my shopping, with the remark that if I happen to want anything in the way of silks, he can call my attention to a most valuable opportunity. And I yield to the voice of the tempter, and burden myself with things I don't want."

After this, the question was easily settled. Mrs. Jerningham met all Lucy's difficulties in the pleasantest manner, while Mrs. Colton put in a kind word every now and then; and, encouraged by so much kindness, Lucy yielded. It was agreed that she should write to her

father, and pack her little carpet-bag of indispensables between that hour and five o'clock, during which interval the two ladies were to pay their visits, and take their luncheon, while the horses had their two hours' rest, and then return, to convey Miss Alford to Hampton in the brougham.

Lucy felt like a creature in a dream when the archetypal carriage had driven away, and she was left alone to make her arrangements for the visit to Hampton. These were not the first refined and well-bred women she had met, but never before had she been on visiting terms with the proprietress of such sables, or such an equipage, as those possessed by Mrs. Jerningham.

"How good of him to give me such kind friends!" she said to herself. She felt gratefully disposed towards Mrs. Jerningham, but her deepest gratitude was given to Laurence, the benefactor and champion who had sent her these new friends in her hour of difficulty.

She had many little duties to perform before

the return of the carriage—little bills to pay, a letter to write to her father, and a post-office order to procure for the same helpless individual. After paying all debts due to landlady and tradesmen, she reserved for herself only one sovereign of the money given her by Laurence Desmond. The rest she sent to the prisoner.

"Do not think me unkind if I ask you to be very careful, dear papa," she wrote. "This money is the last we can expect to receive from Mr. Desmond. He has been more kind than words can express, and I am sure you will feel his kindness as deeply as I do."

And then came a description of the strange lady, the grand carriage, and the invitation that she would fain have refused.

"You must not imagine that I am enjoying myself while you are unhappy, poor dear papa," she continued. "I thought that to refuse Mrs. Jerningham's invitation would seem ungracious to her, and ungrateful to Mr. Desmond; so I am going to Hampton. The train

will bring me to town in an hour whenever you wish to see me, and you have only to write one line to me at River Lawn—isn't that a pretty name for a place?—telling me your wish, in order to be immediately obeyed. I have told Mrs. Wilkins that you may return at any moment, and she has promised to make you comfortable in my absence. She seemed awe-struck by the sight of Mrs. Jerningham's carriage, and has adopted quite a new tone to me within the last hour. You know how disrespectful she has been lately. I think she suspected that you had been taken to that dreadful place; but the appearance of the carriage and the settlement of her account have quite changed her. I hope you do not sit in draughts, and that you take care to secure a corner near the fire. It almost breaks my heart to think of you sitting in that long, dreary room, while I am going away to a pleasant house. It seems almost heartless in me to go; but, believe me, I only do so to avoid offending Mr. Desmond.

"May God bless you, dear papa! and support you in your hour of trouble.

"You ever loving child,

"LUCY."

After this letter to her father, Miss Alford wrote a note to Laurence Desmond, thanking him for his kindness to herself, and putting in a timid little plea for the prisoner in Whitecross Street. By the time these letters were written and posted, and Lucy's modest carpet-bag packed, the brougham was again a thing of wonder for the inhabitants of Paul's Terrace, more especially wonderful upon this occasion by reason of two flaming lamps, that flashed like meteors upon the darkness of Ball's Pond. Lucy could not help feeling a faint thrill of pride as she stepped into this vehicle, attended to the very door by the obsequious Mrs. Wilkins, who insisted on getting in the way of that grandiose creature in livery, whose business it was to open and shut the door of the brougham.

Mrs. Jerningham's bays performed the dis-

tance between London and Hampton in about two hours; and during the long drive Lucy told the two ladies a good deal about herself and her father, and the old days in which Laurence Desmond had read for "greats" at Henley. All this she related without egotism, and urged thereto by Emily, who seemed interested in all Miss Alford had to tell, but most especially interested in her account of Mr. Desmond's reading for honours.

"And was he very industrious?" she asked; "did he work very hard?"

"Well, yes, I believe he read sometimes at night; but I was only nine years old, you know," replied Lucy, "and poor mamma used to send me to bed very early. Mr. Desmond and his two friends used to be on the river nearly all day, sometimes training for boat-races, you know, and sometimes fishing—spinning for jack, I think they used to call it."

"But surely it was not by spinning for jack that Mr. Desmond got his degree?"

"Oh no! of course he did read, you know,

because he came to Henley on purpose to read. I believe there used to be a great deal of reading done every night after the shutters were shut and the lamps lighted. But Mr. Desmond used to say he could never work well until he had used up his idleness; and he declared that he never felt himself in such good training for cramming Thicksides as after a long day's punting."

"Cramming Thicksides!" cried Mrs. Jerningham, in amazement; "what, in mercy's name, did he mean by that?"

"Oh, Thicksides is the Oxonian name for Thucydides."

"How very charming! And at night, when the lamps were lighted, Mr. Desmond and your father used to cram Thicksides?"

"Yes, and Cicero; the Philippics, you know, and that sort of thing; and all the Greek tragedies, and Demosthenes, and Mill's Logic, and the Gospels. I believe Mr. Desmond's friends were both ploughed. Papa said that they were not nearly so clever as he."

"And your papa thinks him very clever, I suppose?"

"Papa says he is one of the best Balliol men; and Balliol is a college where they work very hard, you know."

"Indeed! Miss Alford, I know nothing of the kind."

"I beg your pardon! I only said 'you know' in a general sense, you know. Papa has often told me what a silly, vulgar habit it is, you know; but I go on saying it in spite of myself."

"It is not such a very grave offence, Lucy. May I call you Lucy, Miss Alford?"

"Oh! if you please. I should like it much better than for you to call me Miss Alford."

"In that case it shall always be Lucy," replied Mrs. Jerningham, kindly; "Lucy is such a pretty name, and suits you admirably."

She was thinking of Wordsworth's familiar lines:—

> "A creature not too bright or good
> For human nature's daily food."

"I am not fit for 'human nature's daily

food,' " she said to herself. "I am what the French call *difficile;* not easily pleased by others, never quite satisfied with myself. The circumstances of my life have always been exceptional; but I doubt if I should have been a happy woman under happier circumstances."

The question of how much character may or may not be moulded and influenced by circumstances, was a psychological problem too difficult for Mrs. Jerningham's comprehension. She knew that she was not happy; and there were times when she was inclined to ascribe her unhappiness to some radical defect in her own character, rather than to her exceptional position.

She found herself pleased and interested by Lucy Alford; but she was nevertheless bent on measuring the extent of that young lady's acquaintance with Laurence Desmond.

"I am glad to think that your father considers Mr. Desmond so clever," she said, presently, returning to the charge.

"Oh yes, he is very clever, and as good as

he is clever," replied Lucy, with more enthusiasm than was quite agreeable to her questioner.

"You have seen a great deal of him in the course of your life?"

"Oh yes; I used to be with him and papa a great deal at Henley, in the punt, you know, when I was nine years old. I used to catch flies for them—blue-bottles, and all sorts of flies. It seemed very cruel to the flies, you know; but Mr. Desmond was so kind to me, and I was pleased to be of any use to him."

"And have you seen him very often since you were nine years old?"

"Oh no, very seldom; never until two or three weeks ago, when papa wrote to ask him for an introduction to a London manager. But in that short time he has been so kind, so good, so generous, so thoughtful, that ——"

The rest was expressed by a little choking sob.

"I am glad to think that he is kind, and generous, and thoughtful," said Mrs. Jerningham, very seriously. "He is my friend, Lucy

—a very old and intimate friend; and I am more pleased to hear him praised than to hear any praise of myself. Your gratitude for his kindness touches me very deeply."

There was a tone of appropriation in this speech which was felt rather than understood by Lucy. She was conscious that this grand lady of the irreproachable brougham claimed Laurence Desmond for her own, and she began to perceive how frail a link was that accidental association which bound him to herself.

"Laurence has asked me to be your friend, Lucy," continued Mrs. Jerningham, and something that was almost pain smote Lucy's heart as the lady uttered his Christian name for the first time in her hearing. "He has requested me to be your friend and adviser; and it will be a great pleasure to me to obey his wish. Of course, it will be much better for you to accept friendship from me than from him, Lucy. That kind of thing could not go on for ever, you know."

"Oh, of course not," murmured Lucy. She

was too innocent to perceive the real drift of this remark. She thought that Mrs. Jerningham was considering the business entirely from a pecuniary point of view. "Of course, I know that Mr. Desmond could not afford to go on helping papa as he has been helping him," she said; "it would be very shameful of us to wish it."

"*You* could not afford to receive money from him any longer, Lucy," returned the voice of worldly wisdom from the lips of Mrs. Jerningham. "It would be a most improper position for you to occupy. In future you must tell me your troubles, and I shall be always glad to help you; but all confidences between you and Mr. Desmond had much better come to an end."

"I do not want to confide in him; that is to say, I do not want to ask favours of him," replied poor Lucy, much distressed by this stern dictum. "But my friendship for him cannot come to an end. I cannot so easily forget his kindness. If I were at the Antipo-

des, and with no hope ever to see his face again, I should think of him with the same regard and gratitude to my dying day. If I live to be an old, old woman, I shall always think of him as my truest and kindest friend."

"Your grateful feelings are very creditable; but I hope you will not express yourself in that manner to other people, Lucy. You talk in a way that sounds theatrical, and rather bold. A girl of your age ought not to be so very enthusiastic about any gentleman."

"Not when he has been so good, so generous?"

"Not under any circumstances. You may be grateful as Androcles, or the lion—which was it that was grateful, by the bye?—but you need not indulge in that kind of rhapsody; it is not in very good taste."

This was the first time Lucy had heard of taste, in the modern-society sense of the word. She submitted to Mrs. Jerningham's sentence. The voice of a lady, admired and respected by

Laurence Desmond, must be sacred as the voices of Delphos.

The carriage rolled into the shrubberied drive at River Lawn presently, and then Lucy beheld flashing lights, and a vestibule with bright tesselated pavement, and pictures on the walls, and open doors leading into the brightest, prettiest rooms she had ever seen in her life; and in the dining-room was set forth that banquet so dear to the heart of every true woman—a tea-dinner. Quaint old silver tea and coffee service, turquoise-blue cups and saucers, an antique oval tea-tray, a pierced cake-basket that would make a collector's mouth water; substantial fare in the way of tongue and chicken and game-pie; a room adorned as only perfect taste, allied with wealth, can adorn a room, were the things that greeted Lucy Alford's eyes as she looked round her for the first time in her new friend's home. It was scarcely strange that such a room should seem to her almost like a picture of fairy-land, as contrasted with those dingy lodg-

ings in Ball's Pond, where the last few weeks of her existence had been spent. She thought of her father in his dreary prison-ward, and she could not quite put away from her the feeling that she had no right to be amidst such pleasant surroundings.

CHAPTER VII.

DECEITFUL ABOVE ALL THINGS.

The fair river that wound like a broad ribbon of silver through the lands of Harold Jerningham was not more tranquil than the course of existence at the bailiff's cottage. M. de Bergerac's great book grew slowly and steadily in bulk, and developed day by day from chaos into form; while Helen's simple life went on, eventless and purposeless perhaps, if measured by the ordinary standard by which the world measures existence, every hour filled with pleasant occupation, every morning bringing with it some new delight. Her father, her books, her dog, her piano, her birds, her dairy, her poultry-yard,—these were the delights of Helen's life, and these left her no leisure for the ordinary aspirations of young-ladyhood. It is not to be supposed that so charming a damsel was neglected or ig-

nored by neighbouring families. Helen had to receive an occasional morning visitor, and was obliged sometimes to withdraw the declaration that she never visited, in favour of some friendly matron hunting pretty girls for a garden-party, or presentable pianistes for a musical evening. But she went out very seldom. Her home-life was inexpressibly dear to her, and an evening's absence from the beloved father's side seemed like a break in her existence. What could people give her at garden-parties or musical evenings that was equal to her father's society?

"I meet no one who can talk like you, papa," she said on returning, blooming and radiant, from a neighbouring mansion, not elated because she had been enjoying herself especially abroad, but because she was pleased to come home. "Why should I take the trouble to put on this white dress, and crush all the little flounces that poor Nanon insists upon ironing with her own hands, in order to hear people say stupid things, when I am always so much happier with you in this dear old room? I am

afraid I must be a blue-stocking, papa, for I cannot enjoy the perpetual talk about operas and morning-concerts, and new curates and croquet-parties, that I hear whenever I go out."

It was very pleasant to Eustace Thorburn to discover that the country society had so little fascination for his employer's daughter. It had been anguish to him to see her borne away to halls of dazzling light, or paradisaic croquet-grounds, whither he might not follow. He loved her with a young man's love—pure, honest, and enthusiastic. The depth and intensity, the abnegation of self, which constitutes the religion of love, were as yet only latent in his breast. It was the summer-morning of life, and the barque that bore the lovers onward upon the enchanted waters was floating with the stream. The hour of the turning tide would be the hour to test the strength of Eustace Thorburn's devotion. At present all was smooth and bright and happy, and the affection which these young people felt for one another grew imperceptibly in the hearts of each. Helen did not know why

her life seemed to her so perfect in its calm happiness. Eustace believed that he was battling manfully with his own weakness, and that every day brought him nearer to the hour of victory.

"I am resigned to the thought that Helen de Bergerac may never be my wife," he said to himself; "and yet I am almost happy."

He might have said, quite happy; for a happiness more perfect than any man can hope to experience twice in his life made his new home a paradise for him. He was happy because, unknown to himself, he still hoped; he was happy because he was still the friend and companion of his idol.

"What is to become of me when my task here is finished?" he asked himself. But this was a line of thought which he dared not pursue; beyond that bright home all was darkness.

M. de Bergerac looked on at the little Arcadian comedy, and wondered. The scholar was too unskilled in the study of youthful hearts to read the mysterious cipher in which the secret

thoughts of lovers are written. He saw that the young people were very well pleased with each other's society, but he saw no more; nor did he disturb himself by doubts or apprehensions. Harold Jerningham contemplated the same comedy with angry feelings in his breast; he envied these young people the brightness of their morning. The feeling was mean and detestable. Mr. Jerningham knew this, and hated himself; but the bitter envy of youth and happiness was not to be banished from his heart. "The heart is deceitful above all things and desperately wicked," cries the Prophet; and if it was even so with the people of God, what must it be with such a man as Mr. Jerningham, who had never recognized any other god than himself, and the fancy or the passion of the hour, and who at his best had known for his only law that vague instinct—half pride, half shame—which bad men call honour?

It is quite impossible that a man who performs no duty and cherishes no ambition can escape that fatal decline which leads to the

region of moral darkness. Harold Jerningham had cherished some faint hope of distinction at the beginning of his life. He had made his venture in the lottery, and had drawn, not exactly a blank, but a number so infinitely beneath his expectation that it seemed to him as worthless.

There had been a time when the master of Greenlands, fresh from a successful university career, and steeped to the very lips in Greek verse, had fancied himself a poet. The dream, which was so sweet to Eustace Thorburn, had shed its glamour over his pathway. Even the sweets of fame had come to him in some small measure, but not that laurel-crown which he had hoped to win; so he shrugged his shoulders, laughed at his critics, and wandered away to the sunny lands where life itself is unwritten poetry. Young Jerningham of Brazenose was a very brilliant young man, but he lacked that divine spark, that touch of the superhuman, which men call genius. He had not the fire, the pluck, the energy, the passion of that young lordling who answered his contemptuous critics,

not with *English Bards and Scotch Reviewers* — that was only the *tour de force* of a pamphleteer —but with *Childe Harold*, the inspired verse of a poet supremely unconscious of public and of critics, under the sway of a possession no less potent than that which gave prophetic voice to Cassandra.

Mr. Jerningham had discovered that a handsome face, a manner eminently successful in feminine society, an intimate acquaintance with classic literature, a fine fortune, and some ambition for literary fame, do not make a Byron; and to be anything less than Byron seemed to Mr. Jerningham synonymous with failure. "I am like the tiger," said Byron. "If I do not succeed with the first spring, I go back growling to my cave." Mr. Jerningham was also like the tiger. He went back to his cave, and remained there. "Cæsar or nothing," he had said to himself, when he made his venture. The result was nothing.

The fact that he had thus aspired and failed, may have had some slight influence upon his

feelings on the subject of Eustace Thorburn. The young man's ambitious hopes were never paraded. It was only by the glow upon his face, and the warmth of his words, when he praised the poets of the past, that he unconsciously revealed the bent of his mind. For the rest, Mr. Jerningham heard a great deal about the young poet's hopes and dreams from Helen, who was his confidante and adviser.

"He helps me so kindly with all my studies, that it is the least I can do to be interested in his poems," Helen said, as if she felt herself bound to apologize for the warmth of her interest in this subject. "He is writing a long poem, something in the style of Mrs. Browning's *Aurora Leigh*, only with a much prettier story for the groundwork; and he has read me little bits—such noble verses! And then he writes an occasional short poem, just as the fancy strikes him. Some of the short poems have been published in the magazines. Perhaps you would like to see them?"

Helen rose as if to go in search of the maga-

zines, but Mr. Jerningham stopped her with a hasty gesture of deprecation.

"Please spare me the short poems, my dear Helen," he said. "I have given up reading my Horace and Catullus, since I have passed the poetic age. Don't ask me to read magazine verses."

Helen looked very much disappointed.

"I dare say, two thousand years hence, learned men will be disputing about a false quantity in one of Mr. Thorburn's poems," said her father. "Not every poet can hope to be thought great in his own century. Do you remember that preface of Webster's to the *White Devil*, in which he names all the dramatists of the day, and last of all, 'without wrong so to be named, the right happy and copious industry of master Shakspeare'?"

"Yes," answered Mr. Jerningham. "I don't think either Shakspeare or Molière had the faintest suspicion that he was to be immortal. It is only once in a thousand years that a poet drinks the cup of triumph that

Byron drained to the very lees. He tasted the lees, and died with the bitterness of them on his lips. He might have tasted nothing but lees had he lived longer. For one man who dies too soon, a hundred die too late. There is a golden opportunity for effective death in every man's career, but few are wise enough to seize it. If the first Napoleon had fallen at Austerlitz, he would have taken high rank among the demi-gods; nay, De Quincey suggests that even Commodus might have made a shred of character for himself by dying immediately after a triumphant display of his genius as a toxophilite."

Mr. Jerningham's distaste for his friend's secretary did not keep him away from the cottage. He came at all times and seasons, and if his only possibility of happiness had been found in that house, he could not have seemed less inclined to leave it, or more eager to return to it. Weeks, and even months, passed, and he still remained in England, spending a few

days every now and then at the bijou house in Park Lane, but making Greenlands his head-quarters. Capricious in all his movements, he came when he pleased, and departed when he pleased. Theodore de Bergerac loved and trusted him, as it was his nature to love and trust those whom he thought worthy of his friendship. The welcome that awaited him was always equally cordial. He had never imagined so calm a haven.

"If I could spend the rest of my life here, I might die a good Christian," he said to himself; until, little by little, he came to understand that those feelings which made the bailiff's cottage so pleasant to him were not altogether Christianlike.

He hated Eustace Thorburn. He envied him his youth, his hopefulness, his chances of future distinction; above all, he envied him the love of Helen de Bergerac. Yes, there was the sting. Youth, hope, chances of future glory, might all have been given to this young man, and Harold Jerningham would have let

him go by with a careless sneer. But Eustace Thorburn had more than these gifts; he had the love of a pure and bright young creature, whose purity and brightness had touched the heart of this middle-aged sybarite as it had never been touched before. His fancy, his vanity, his pride of conquest, had been the motive power to sustain him in bygone victories. He had dreamed his dreams, and had awakened suddenly to see Fancy's radiant vision vanish before the chill gray light of Reality's cheerless dawn.

But this time the dream was fairer than any of those old, forgotten visions. This time the heart of the man, and not the poet's fancy only, was touched and subjugated. It was many years since the master of Greenlands had bade a formal farewell to the follies and delusions of youth, and he had believed the farewell eternal. And now, in a moment, unbidden, dreams, delusions, and folly returned to hold him with fatal sway; and in his self-communings he confessed that it was no com-

mon sentiment which made Helen's presence so delightful, and no common prejudice that rendered Eustace Thorburn so odious.

He confessed to himself as much as this; and knowing this, he lingered at Greenlands, and came day after day to sit beside his friend's hearth, or loiter in his friend's garden. And why should he not snatch the brief hours of happiness which yet remained for him—the Indian summer of his life?

"I am an old man," he said to himself; "at least, in the eyes of this girl I must seem an old man. She will never know that I regard her with any warmer sentiment than a fatherly kind of friendship. She will dream her own dreams, and think her own thoughts, unconscious of her influence on mine. And by and by, after a few months of sentimental flirtation, she will marry this young secretary, or some other man, young, self-satisfied, good-looking, empty-headed, and utterly unable to understand how divine a treasure the fates have bestowed upon him."

With such philosophy as this did Mr. Jerningham trifle with his conscience, or rather that vague sense of honour which stood him instead of conscience. But there were times when philosophy gave poor comfort to the soul of this unprincipled egotist, who until now had never known what it was to set a seal upon his lips or a curb upon his will. There were hours of envious rage, of dark remorse, of vain, passionate broodings on the things that might have been; there were hours in which the spirits of evil claimed Harold Jerningham for their own, and walked about with him, and hovered around his bed as he slept, and made his dreams hideous with shapeless horrors. He looked back upon his early dreams, and laughed at their folly. He was like that French libertine who, in writing of his youthful caprices, said, "My hour for loving truly and profoundly had not yet come." That fateful hour, which comes to every man, had come to this one too late.

What special charm in this girl enthralled

his mind and melted his heart? He did not know. It could scarcely be her beauty, for his life had been spent amongst beautiful women, and his heart had long ago become impervious to the fascination of a fair and noble face. It may have been her innocence, her youth, her gentleness, that had subdued this world-weary cynic—the poetic charm of her surroundings, the sweet repose which seemed a part of the very atmosphere she breathed.

Yes, in this youthful purity there lurked the potent charm that held Harold Jerningham. The girl, with her sweet, confiding face and pure thoughts, the rustic life, the perfume of Arcadia, composed the subtle charm that had intoxicated Mr. Jerningham's senses. What is so delightful as novelty to an idle, *blasé* creature of the Jerningham type? The life at Greenlands had all the charm of novelty; it was fresh, piquant, exhilarating, because of its very innocence; and as it had never been in Mr. Jerningham's creed to deny himself any

pleasure, he lingered at the neglected house in which his father and mother had died. He spent his evenings at the bailiff's cottage, and left the issue to fate.

"She will never know how tenderly her father's old friend loves her," he said to himself; "and at the worst I may prevent her throwing herself away upon an adventurer."

CHAPTER VIII.

DANIEL MAYFIELD'S COUNSEL.

The great book and his own studies afforded Mr. Thorburn ample occupation for all his days and nights. If his days had been twice as long as they were, the young man would have found work for every hour. He was very ambitious, and he had that passionate love of learning for its own sake which marks the predestined scholar. But with all a Bentley or a Porson's delight in the niceties of a Greek verb or the use of a preposition, he was as free from pedantry as from every other affectation. In the garden, on the river, by the piano, or on the croquet lawn, he was a match for the most empty-headed bachelor in Berkshire; and if he played croquet on mathematical principles, he was careful to keep that fact to himself. He had a knack of doing everything well, and even

Mr. Jerningham was fain to admit that he was in tone and manner irreproachable. Never was the boyish candour of light-hearted youth more pleasantly blended with the self-possession of accomplished manhood. Grave and earnest, when good taste required that he should be serious; in his moments of expansion, full of enthusiasm and vivacity; always deferential to superior age and attainments, yet entirely without sycophancy; profoundly respectful in his intercourse with women—Eustace Thorburn was a man who made friends for himself unconsciously.

"I am very proud of my daughter," M. de Bergerac said to Harold Jerningham one day, when they had been talking of the secretary; "but I should have been prouder still of such a son as that young man."

"I have no passion for pattern young men," replied Mr. Jerningham. "I dare say your model secretary is very amiable. You pay him a salary for being amiable, you see, and he occupies a very pleasant position in your house.

But I cannot quite understand how you could bring yourself to admit a stranger into the bosom of your family. The arrangement reminds me a little of those curious advertisements one sees in the *Times*. A family who occupy a house too large for their requirements invite a gentleman engaged in the City during the day to share the delights of their too spacious mansion; and they promise him cheerful society—imagine the horror implied in pledging yourself to be cheerful all the year round for a gentleman engaged in the City!—and the gentleman comes to be welcomed to the arms of the family who know about as much of his antecedents, or his qualities of head and heart, as if he were an inhabitant of the planet Mars. Now it seems to me that you receive Mr. Thorburn very much on the same principle."

"Not at all. I had Mr. Desmond's credentials for my secretary's character."

"And how much does Mr. Desmond know of your secretary?"

"I can scarcely tell you that. I know that Desmond's letter of recommendation was very satisfactory, and that the result has justified the letter."

"And you do not even know who and what the young man's father was?"

"I do not; but I would pledge my life upon the young man's honesty of purpose, and I am not inclined to trouble myself about his father."

This conversation was eminently provoking to Mr. Jerningham. He had of late found himself tormented by an irritating curiosity upon the subject of Eustace Thorburn. He wanted to know who and what this man was whom he envied with so iniquitous an envy, whom he hated with a hatred so utterly unprovoked. Had he good blood in his veins, this young adventurer, who carried himself with an easy grace that could scarcely have been given to a plebeian? Mr. Jerningham was a Conservative in the narrowest sense of the word, and did not believe in nature's nobility. He watched Eustace Thorburn with cold, critical

eyes, and was fain to admit that in this young man there were no traces of vulgar origin.

"And they say he is like me," Mr. Jerningham said to himself. "Was I ever as handsome as that, as bright, as candid in tone and frank in manner? I think not. Life was too smooth for me when I was a young man, and prosperity spoiled me."

Mr. Jerningham looked back at the days of his youth, and remembered how prosperous they had been, and was fain to confess to himself that it might have been better for him if Fortune had been less lavish of her gifts. Absolute power is a crucial test that few men can stand. Absolute power makes a Caligula or a Heliogabalus, a Sixtus the Fourth or an Alexander the Sixth; and do not wealth, and good looks, and youth, and a decent amount of talent, constitute a power as absolute as the dominion of imperial papal Rome?

While Mr. Jerningham lingered—idle, discontented, ill at ease—amidst that Berkshire landscape which made Eustace Thorburn's paradise,

the young man's life crept on, sweet as a summer-day's dream. It had dawned upon him of late that he was not liked by the master of Greenlands, and he endured that affliction with becoming patience. He would have wished to be liked and trusted by all mankind, since his own heart knew only kindly feelings, except always against that one man who had to answer for his mother's broken life. He wished to be on good terms with everybody; but if a cynical, middle-aged gentleman chose to dislike him, he was the last of men to court the cynical gentleman's liking.

"I dare say Mr. Jerningham thinks there is a kind of impertinence in my likeness to him," Eustace thought, when Harold's eyes had watched him with a more than usually disdainful gaze. "He is angry with nature herself for having made a nameless adventurer somewhat after his image. Am I like him, I wonder? Yes, I see a look of his face in my own when I look in my glass. And that woman, Mrs. Willows, told me that I reminded

her of my father; so Mr. Jerningham must be like my father. I can almost fancy my father that kind of man—cold, and proud, and selfish; for I know that Mr. Jerningham is selfish, in spite of M. de Bergerac's praise of him."

The idea that Harold Jerningham must needs bear some faint resemblance to the father whom Eustace had never seen, quickened the young man's interest in him. The two men watched each other, and thought of each other, and wondered about each other, with ever-increasing interest, each seeking to fathom the hidden depths of the other's nature, each baffled by that conventional external life which raises a kind of screen between the real and the artificial man.

Mr. Jerningham was a master of the art of concealing his sentiments, and Eustace, frank, true, and young as he was, kept his gravest thoughts locked in his own breast; so, after meeting nearly every day for some months, the two men knew very little more of each other

than they had known after the first week of their intercourse.

Early in June, when the garden and park, river and wood-crowned hills beyond, were looking unspeakably beautiful in the early summer, Eustace left that arcadian paradise for a week's hard labour in the manuscript-room of the British Museum, where there were certain documents bearing upon the subject of M. de Bergerac's *magnum opus*—records of trials for witchcraft; ghastly confessions, wrung from the white lips of writhing wretches in the torture-chambers of mediæval England; hideous details of trial and *auto da fé* in the days when the great stone scaffold stood at the gates of Seville, and the smoke and the stench of burning heretics darkened the skies of Spain.

Eustace shared his Uncle Dan's lodgings on this occasion as on the last, to the delight of both. To Daniel Mayfield his nephew's presence was like a glimpse of green fields and cooling waters seen athwart the arid sands of a desert.

"You are like a summer wind, blowing the hopes and joys of my youth back to me," said Daniel, as the two men dined together on the first evening. "You are not like your mother, dear boy; but you have a look of hers in your eyes when you are at your best."

"I have been told that I am like my father," said Eustace, thoughtfully.

"Told by whom?"

"By Mrs. Willows — Sarah Kimber — my mother's friend."

"Indeed! Yes; Sarah Kimber must have seen that man."

"And you never saw him?"

"Never. I was in London at the time. If I had been at Bayham, things might have been——Ah, well, we always think we could have saved our darlings from ruin or death if we had been at hand. God would not save her. But who knows if it was not better for her to have sinned, and suffered, and repented, and lived her pure, unselfish life for twenty years, to die humble and trusting, as

she did, than to have married some vulgar, prosperous tradesman, and to have grown hard, and bitter, and worldly? Better for her to be the Publican than the Pharisee. You know what I am in the matter of religious opinion, Eustace; or, at any rate, you know as well as I know myself how I take Rabelais' Great Perhaps; but since your mother's death the hope of something better to come, after all this wear and tear, and drudgery and turmoil, has seemed nearer to me. The Great Perhaps has grown almost into a certainty; and sometimes at sunset, when I am walking in the busiest street in this great clamorous city, I see the sun going down in crimson glory behind the house-tops, and in the midst of all that roar and bustle, with the omnibuses rattling past, and the crowd jostling and pushing me as I tramp along, I think of the golden-paved city, that has no need of either sun or moon to shine in it, but is lighted with the glory of God; and I wish that the farce were over and the curtain dropped."

Much more was said about the mild and inoffensive creature whom these two men had loved so dearly. To Eustace there was supreme comfort in this quiet talk about the unforgotten dead. After this there came more cheerful talk. Daniel Mayfield was anxious to ascertain what his nephew's life was like at Greenlands.

"It is not an unprofitable life, at any rate," he said, with a proud smile; "for those little poems you send me now and then for the magazines show a marked growth of mind. It ripens the mind; and the heart is not absorbed by the brain. That is the point. It is so difficult to keep heart and brain alive together. Do you remember what Vasari says of Giotto, '*Il renouvela l'art, parcequ'il mit plus de bonté dans les têtes*'? There is *bonté* in your verses, my lad; and if Dan Mayfield is anything of a judge of literary yearlings, you may safely enter yourself for some of the great events. Of course, you will not depend upon verse-making for your daily bread. Verse-

making is the Sabbath of a hard-working literary life. You will find good work to do without descending to such cab-horse labour as mine has been. And take to heart this one precept throughout your literary career: you have only one master, and that master is the British public. For your critics, if they are honest, respect and honour them with all your heart and mind; accept their blame in all humility, and be diligent to learn whatever they can teach. But when the false prophets assail you,—they who come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly are ravening wolves, — the critics who are no critics, but unsuccessful writers or trade rivals in disguise,—be on your guard, and take care of your cheese. You know the fable: the fox flattered the raven until the weak-minded bird dropped her cheese. The fox goes on another principle now-a-days, and reviles the raven; but for the same purpose. Remember my warning, Eustace, and don't drop your cheese. The public, your master,

has a very plain way of expressing its opinion. If the public like your book, the public will read it ; if not, the public will assuredly let it alone ; and all the king's horses and all the king's men, in the way of criticism, cannot set you up or knock you down, unless the reading public is with them. Accept this brief sermon, Eustace, from a man who has lived and suffered."

Those were pleasant hours which the two men spent together, sitting late into the night, talking of books and men, of worlds seen and unseen ; metaphysical, practical, poetical, theological, by turns, as the stream of talk flowed onward in its wandering way—erratic as the most wayward brook that ever strayed by hill-side and meadow.

Eustace believed in his Uncle Dan as the greatest of men ; and, indeed, in close companionship, the most stolid of companions could scarcely refrain from some expression of wonder and delight on beholding so much unconscious power, such depth of thought,

such wealth of fancy, such grand imaginings,—all scattered as recklessly as Daniel Mayfield scattered his more substantial possessions in the shape of sovereigns and half-crowns. A dangerous enemy, a warm friend, a pitiless assailant, a staunch champion, large of heart and large of brain, more like Ben Jonson than Shakspeare, nearer to Dryden than to Pope, to Steele than to Addison,—such was Daniel Mayfield, essayist, reviewer, historian —what you will; always excellent, and sometimes great; but never so admirable a creature as when he sat smoking his meerschaum, dreamily, and looking across the blue mists of tobacco at the nephew he loved.

"And you are really and truly happy at Greenlands?" he said, after the young man had told him a good deal about his life in Berkshire.

"Happier than I ever was before in a stranger's house," answered Eustace; "though Mr. Jerningham evidently considers me an intruder."

"Never mind Mr. Jerningham; you do not

exist to please him. M. de Bergerac likes you: and Mademoiselle—she tolerates you, I suppose?"

A vivid blush betrayed that secret which Eustace Thorburn was so incapable of concealing.

"Ho, ho!" cried Daniel; "that is where we are, is it? We are in love with our employer's daughter! Take care, Eustace; that way madness lies."

"I know that," the young man answered, gravely. "I have kept that in my mind ever since I first went to Greenlands."

"Ever since? Ah, then it is an old story!"

"I know the chances are against me, and I mean to cure myself, sooner or later; unless—— Well, Uncle Dan, I can't teach myself to look at this business as altogether desperate. M. de Bergerac is all goodness, generosity, simplicity: and as for Helen—— Don't think me a coxcomb or a fool if I say I believe she loves me. We have been together for nearly a year, you see, like brother and sister; I teaching her

Greek, she teaching me music. I play the basses of her duets—you remember how my poor mother taught me, when I was a child—and we have all kinds of tastes, and predilections, and enthusiasms in common. I cannot believe we could be so completely happy together if—if there were not something more than common sympathy between us. Don't laugh at me, Uncle Dan."

"Shall I laugh at youth, and hope, and love?" cried Daniel Mayfield. "The next thing would be to laugh at the angels in heaven.—And so she loves you, this Demoiselle de Bergerac? I wonder how she could help loving you, forsooth! Has her father any inkling of this pretty little pastoral comedy that is being enacted under his very nose?"

"I doubt it. He is simplicity itself."

"And don't you think, Eustace, that, in consideration for that sweet, child-like simplicity which so often goes with scholarship, you are bound to tell him the truth? You see, your position in the house is a privilege

which you can scarcely enjoy with the consciousness of this treasonable secret. Tell M. de Bergerac the whole truth,—your plans, your chances of future distinction,—and ascertain from his own lips whether there is any hope for you."

"And if he tells me there is no hope?"

"Well, that will seem a death-blow, of course. But if the girl really loves you, her heart will be always on your side. In that case, I should say wait, and put your trust in Time—Time, the father of Truth, as Mary Stuart called him when she wanted to obtain belief for a bouncer,—and oh, what an incredible number of royal bouncers were carried to and fro in the despatches of that period! Wait, Eustace, and when you have made a hit in the literary world, you can carry your laurel-crown to M. de Bergerac, and make an appeal against his stern decision."

"And in the meantime, while the laurels are growing for my crown, some one else will marry Helen."

"That is probable, if her love for you is only the caprice of a boarding-school miss, in which case you will be better off without her. Don't look at me so despairingly, dear boy. You cannot get five-and-forty to regard these things with the eyes of five-and-twenty. I have had my own dream and my own disappointment, and have gone my ways, and cannot tell whether I am worse or better for my loss. Do you remember that tender little essay of Charles Lamb's, in which he tells us about the children that might have been—the dear, loving, pretty creatures, who never lived except in Elia's dreams? I have my little family too, Eustace; and of a night, when I sit alone and the candles burn dim on yonder table, they come out of the dusky corners and stand at my knee, and I talk to them, and tell them of the things that might have been if they had ever been born. And yet, how do I know that they wouldn't have turned out the veriest little rascals and scoundrels in Christendom, and the torment of my existence? I have missed the home that

I once dreamt of; but I have my pipe and my rare old books, and my faithful friends who come sometimes of an evening to play a rubber with me—as Elia's friends used to come to him—and I take things quietly, and say Kismet. Be honest and true, Eustace, and leave the rest to the destiny that 'shapes our ends.'

"I have thought that it might be my duty to tell M. de Bergerac the truth," said Eustace, thoughtfully; "but then, you see, I have set a watch upon every look and word. I have preserved my own proper position as a paid secretary with punctilious care. What harm is there in my presence in that house, where I am so happy, so long as I keep my secret?"

"But can you tell how long you may keep it?" asked the incredulous Daniel, "or how many times you betray it in a single day to every one except that dreaming student, who has evidently no eyes to see anything that lies beyond his own desk? Your girlish blush betrayed you to me—blushes, and looks, and tones,

and sighs will betray you to the demoiselle, and then some day the great discovery will be made all at once, and you will find yourself in a false position."

"Yes, Uncle Dan; I begin to think you are right. I should be a scoundrel to profit by that dear old man's simplicity. I will tell him the truth, and leave Greenlands. Ah, you cannot imagine how happy I have been there. And then, I am so useful to M. de Bergerac. The great book will come to a standstill again, or at any rate go on very slowly. And I am so interested in my work. It seems very hard, Uncle Dan; but I suppose it must be done."

"It had better be done, my dear boy. Besides, you may not lose by your candour. M. de Bergerac may tell you to remain."

"I cannot hope that. But I will take your advice; the truth is always best."

"Always best and wisest."

It was thus decided. Eustace wrung his uncle's hand in silence, and retired, pale and sorrowful. The elder man felt this keenly;

but he had something of the Spartan's feelings in his relations with his beloved nephew.

"I have kept him away from me because I love him, and now I take him from this girl because I love him," he thought, as he smoked his last pipe in cheerless solitude. "I am more watchful of his honour than ever I was of my own."

There was very little more said about Greenlands during the few remaining days of Eustace Thorburn's visit. His face told Daniel that the die was cast. The young Spartan had determined to do his duty.

CHAPTER IX.

BETWEEN EDEN AND EXILE.

On the last night of Eustace Thorburn's abode in his uncle's lodgings, the two men sat very late, talking earnestly, the elder watching the face of the younger with more than usual tenderness.

"I dare say the future seems a little dark to you, dear lad," he began, softly, after they had talked of all the things except that which was nearest to the hearts of both. "I won't try to comfort you with the usual philosophical truisms about the foolishness of youthful fancies. I won't preach the *vanitas vanitatum* of worn-out middle age to hoping, dreaming, despairing youth. Keep the dream, boy, even if there is a bitter flavour of despair mingled with the sweetness of it. Keep the dream. Such dreams are

the guardian angels of youth, the patron-saints of manhood. I have my patron-saint, and I pray to her sometimes, and confess my sins to her, and receive absolution, and am comforted. To my eyes Mademoiselle de Bergerac would most likely be only a pretty young person, with blue eyes—I think you said blue eyes—and a white muslin frock. But if she seem an angel to you, enthrone her in your heart of hearts. A man is all the better for carrying an angel about with him, even if it be only an angel of his own making."

And then, after a pause, Daniel went on. "About your future career as a man of letters, I think you need have no misgiving. Those little verses which you submitted to me in such fear and trembling have made their mark. They have gone straight to the hearts of the people. The rising generation always elects its own poet. The students of the Quartier Latin knew Alfred de Musset's verses by heart, and spouted and sang them, before they were reprinted from the magazine where they first

appeared. M. de Lamartine thought very small things of the youngster, just as Byron thought very small things of Monsieur Lamartine himself. No, Eustace, I have no fear for your future. When you leave Greenlands, it shall not be for the smoke and riot of London. You must take a lodging at some pretty village by the river, and write your book or your poem as your guardian angel directs; and if your heart is broken, and you put it into your book, so much the better. Your heart can be patched up again by and by; and in the meantime the public likes a book with a genuine broken heart in it. Byron used to break his heart once a year, and send Murray the pieces."

"I could not trade upon my sorrows as Byron did."

"Because you are not Byron. He did not trade upon his sorrows. That is a true saying of Owen Meredith's, 'Genius is greater than man. Genius does what it must, and talent does what it can.' I quote from memory. Byron's was genius—the real fire; the super-

natural force that is given to a man to use, but seldom given him to govern. Byron was the Ajax of poets,—abused, distraught, roaring like a bull in his mighty pain,—and a demi-god."

After this there came a long and animated discourse upon Byron and his successors. Of all things, Eustace loved best to talk of poetry and poets, from Homer to Tennyson. What mortal creature does not like to talk "shop"? And then, when the two men had wearied themselves with the pleasant excitement of debate, there was a silence of some minutes, which was broken abruptly by Daniel Mayfield.

"I made a discovery the other day, Eustace," he said. "I have had half a mind to tell you nothing about it; but perhaps it is as well you should be told."

"What kind of discovery, Uncle Dan?"

"A discovery about—well—about the author of *Dion*."

"What? Have you found out who he is?"

"No," replied Daniel, very gravely; "I am

no wiser as to his name and status; but I have found out that he was a villain, and is a villain still, if he lives, I dare say; for I don't think so base a wretch as that would be likely to amend with age. I doubt if it will ever be any good to you to know more of your father than you knew when your poor mother died; but you have wished to be wiser, and I have humoured your wish. Do you remember what I said to you after I read *Dion?*

"I remember every word."

"I told you then that the author of that book must have been the kind of man to fascinate such a girl as your mother. I have met with another book written by the same man, and have read it as carefully as I read the first. Eustace, I believe that man was your father."

"You—you believe that?"

"Yes," returned Daniel, earnestly. "There is a picture of your mother's girlhood in the book I have been reading—a likeness too close to be accidental."

"Let me see it, Uncle Dan! let me see

that book! Let me only assure myself that the man who wrote it was——"

"What would you do if you were sure of that?"

"I would find him—or his grave."

The young man had risen, and stood before his kinsman, breathless, eager, ready to confront the universe in his passionate desire to avenge the wrongs of the dead. Standing thus, he looked like a sculptor's ideal image of righteous anger.

Daniel Mayfield looked up at him with a sad smile.

"And then," he said; "and then—what then? If you find a grave, will you trample or spit upon it? Surely it would be but a sorry vengeance to insult the dead. And if you find this man in the flesh, what will you do to him? Your face tells me you would like to kill him. You look like Orestes newly come from the temple of Loxias Apollo, charged with his dreadful duty. But Orestes did not seem any the happier for having killed his mother. The primitive instinct must

always be—kill; the thirst for blood. It is only human nature to want to kill the man who has offended you, and the modern horse-whipping is a feeble substitute for the exploded duel. But then Christianity comes in, with its law of sufferance and submission. No, dear lad, I cannot believe that any good could come of a meeting between you and your father, unless——"

"Unless what, Uncle Dan?" asked Eustace, when the other paused.

"Unless, by his affection for you, he could atone for his desertion of your mother."

"Atone for that!" cried the young man. "Do you think any favours that man could bestow on me would blot out the remembrance of her wrongs? Do you think I could be so mean as to sell my heritage of vengeance for some mess of pottage in the shape of worldly advantage? No, Uncle Dan; she is dead, and there is no such thing as atonement. It is too late—too late! While she lived she was ready to forgive; nature made her to love and pardon.

If he had come then, and she had forgiven him, I could have forgiven for her—with her. But she is gone. That man permitted her to die alone; and if I could forgive him the wrongs that blighted her life, I could not forgive him that last wrong—her lonely death-bed. And do you think he cares for my love or my forgiveness? The man who could leave my mother to her lonely fate for twenty years is not likely to be suddenly possessed with affection for her son."

"The day may come when you will be a son whom any father would be proud to claim."

"Let him claim me in that day, if he dare," answered Eustace, with kindling eyes. "I belong to the dead. And now, Uncle Dan, tell me what this book is, and how you came by it."

"That part of the business is commonplace enough. I told you I knew a handy scrub of a man, good at picking up any out-of-the-way book I may happen to want. I commissioned this man to hunt the second-hand booksellers for a copy of *Dion*—strange that neither you nor I ever speculated on the author of *Dion*

having written other books! My man hunted without result as regards *Dion;* but one morning he came to me with a couple of thin volumes, bound in gray paper-covered boards, and looking very dingy in comparison with the gaudy cloth and gilt lettering that obtains now-a-days. He had hunted in vain for *Dion,* he informed me; but in the course of his search he had come across this other book by the author of *Dion.* The book is yonder, in that parcel.—No," cried Daniel, pushing the young man gently aside; "you shall not look at the book while you are with me. *That* is a subject I do not care to talk about. Carry the parcel down to Greenlands with you, and read the book quietly—at night, in your own room. You will know little more of your father after you have read it than you know now. The book is a study in morbid anatomy; it is the revelation of an utterly selfish nature, and the writer is an unconscious moralist. *Vanitas vanitatum* is the unwritten refrain of his song."

"Was the book a success, like *Dion?*"

"It was not. I have taken the trouble to refer to the literary journals for the year in which this second book was published. In some it is passed over with a few cold words of approval, in others unnoticed; in one it forms the subject of what French critics call a *sanglant article*. The book wants all that is best in *Dion*—the freshness, the youth, the young romance that plays at bo-beep behind a mask of world-weariness. There is an interval of ten years between the two books. In the second the writer is really *blasé*. He is ten times more egotistical, more contemptuous and suspicious of his fellow-men—more everything that is bad. He has ceased to enjoy anything in life. He has no enjoyment even in his writing; indeed, he writes with the air of a man who knows he will only be read by inferior creatures, and one expects him at every moment to throw down the pen. One cannot read the book without yawning, for one feels that the man yawned while he was writing it."

"And in this cold epitome of his selfish life he writes of my mother?"

"Yes."

"And throughout the book you believe it is of himself he writes?"

"Of that I am certain. A man has a tone in writing of himself that he never has when his subject is only some figment of the brain. There is a passion, an acrimony, in genuine autobiography not to be mistaken. I do not say that this book is a plain narration of facts. There is no doubt considerable dressing-up and disguising of events; but the under-current of reality is obvious to the least experienced reader. There is one point that puzzles—I must own perplexes—me beyond measure. It was perhaps a mistaken delicacy which induced me to respect your mother's silence about all things relating to that bad man. If I had found this book during her life-time, I should have broached this painful subject, and compelled her to tell me all."

"But why—why?" Eustace asked, with

breathless eagerness. "What had you to learn more than those letters tell us—that he was a villain, without heart or conscience, and that she was young and guileless, and loved him only too dearly?"

"There are passages in that book which have made me think that the relations between this man and my sister were something more than we have believed."

"You think that he married my mother?"

"I am disposed to think so. But the marriage—if it took place—could hardly have been an ordinary marriage. His allusions to it are very vague; but it seems as if, whatever the ceremonial was, its legal importance was only known to this man himself."

"Why do you think this?"

"From certain faint hints here and there. 'If she only knew her legal hold upon me,' he writes; 'if she were a woman of the world, and knew her power.' There is some hidden meaning in these half-sentences; I know not what. In a record of mixed reality and fiction, who is

to say where reality ends and fiction begins? But you will read the book, and then judge for yourself."

Eustace Thorburn went back to Greenlands, depressed, but not utterly disheartened. He knew that his uncle had urged upon him the only honourable course open to him in his relations with M. de Bergerac. It would have been sweet to him to live on for ever in that friendly companionship with the bright and gentle creature who had welcomed him to her home with such simple kindness. And now reflection had convinced him that it was necessary to resign the dear privilege of this innocent companionship, he felt more keenly than he had felt hitherto all the sweetness of his life at Greenlands, and the dreariness of any life that could come after it. His ambition would be left to him; that wonderful, radiant high-road which every young man believes in—the *via sacra* that leads straight across the untrodden wilderness of the future to the Temple of

Fame—would still await the coming of his eager feet. But even that sacred road would seem dreary and desolate if the pole-star of hope were darkened; or, in plainer words, it must seem to him but a poor thing to make his mark in the world of letters, if he were not to be blest with Helen de Bergerac's love.

He returned to Greenlands by the same pathway which he had trodden just one year before, when he went a stranger to M. de Bergerac's house. Ah, how unutterably beautiful the Berkshire landscape seemed to him in its ripe, rich midsummer loveliness! High tangled hedge, winding lane, distant hill, and woodland shone before him like a picture too divine for earth.

"And I am to leave all this, and to leave her!" he thought. "I am to be self-banished from a home that Horace might have loved, and from the tranquil life which is a poet's best education. If such a sacrifice as this be duty, it is very hard."

For the first time in his life this young man

found himself before the altar on which he was to immolate his happiness. In the existence of every man there comes the hour in which he must needs sacrifice his first-born, or live inglorious, with the remorseful consciousness that he has shrunk from the performance of a duty. The altar is there, and Isaac, and the knife is given to him. Heaven help the weak wretch if his courage fail him in that awful moment, and he refuse to complete the propitiation!

Eustace Thorburn approached his altar resolute, but very sorrowful, and the voice of the tempter pleaded with the casuistry of an Escobar.

"Why not stop, at least, till the book is finished?" said the tempter. "You will be doing your kind employer a disservice by depriving him of your labour. Your mighty secret can do no harm so long as it is securely locked in your own breast, and are you so weak a fool that you must needs betray yourself?"

And hereupon the stern voice of Duty took up the argument.

"What warranty can you give for the preservation of your secret?" asked the cold, calm matron. "A word, a look from that foolish chit, Mademoiselle de Bergerac, and the story would be told. As for the great book, which is, no doubt, foredoomed to be the ruin of some too-confiding publisher, you may give M. de Bergerac almost as much assistance in London as you can give him in Berkshire."

Eustace heard voices and gay laughter in the garden as he drew near the gate in the holly-hedge, and amongst other voices the low, gentlemanlike tones of Harold Jerningham. Hephæstus barked a noisy welcome as the young man opened the gate. M. de Bergerac and Mr. Jerningham were sitting by a tea-table under the chestnut-trees, deep in a learned dispute upon the history of Islamism; while Helen busied herself with the cups and saucers, and looked up every now and then to join in the argument, or to laugh at the acrimony of the disputants.

"So Mr. Jerningham has not left Berkshire, although he talked of starting for a yachting

expedition to Norway last week," thought Eustace, not too well pleased to see the master of Greenlands so completely at home in that dear abode which he was himself so soon to leave.

Helen started up from the tea-table with a little exclamation of delight as the returning traveller came across the lawn. She blushed as she welcomed him; but blushes at eighteen mean very little. Mr. Jerningham stopped in the middle of a sentence, and watched the young lady with attentive eyes as she shook hands with her father's secretary.

"We are so pleased to see you back again, Mr. Thorburn," she said. "We have missed you so much—haven't we, papa?"

"Yes, my dear, I have been very much at a loss for my kind assistant," answered M. de Bergerac. "Would you imagine it possible, Thorburn, that any man can pretend to doubt the original genius and creative power of Mahomet?"

And hereupon M. de Bergerac entered upon a long disquisition on the subject that was

dearest to his heart, and Eustace had to listen in reverential silence, while he was languishing to tell Helen about the little commissions he had executed for her in town, or to inquire into the health of her song-birds, or the economy of the poultry-yard to which she devoted so much care. He wanted some excuse for looking at her sweet face and hearing her beloved voice, and all the poetry of Mohammedanism seemed dull and prosaic to him when compared with the magical charm of the commonest observation this young lady could utter. It is given to youth and beauty to drop pearls and diamonds from her lips unconsciously—pearls and diamonds invisible to common eyes, it is true, but the most precious of all gems for that one person to whom the speaker seems at once an angel and a goddess.

For that one evening Eustace Thorburn permitted himself to be unutterably happy. So magical a light does true love shed on the scene it illumines, that the lover's eye is blinded for the moment to all that lies beyond

the region thus glorified. The future scarcely existed for the mind of Eustace Thorburn that happy midsummer evening. He lived in the present; and this quaint old garden, these chestnut-trees, this white-robed maiden seated under the shadow, dim and ghost-like in the twilight, constituted the world. The great canopy of heaven, and the young moon, and all the stars, the murmuring river, and shadowy woods and distant hills, had been created for those two. She was Eve, and he was Adam, and this was Paradise. The tones of the two sages disputing about the Sheeahs and the Soonnees might have been the murmurings of the west wind for any consciousness that Eustace had of their neighbourhood when once he was released from the duty of listening to M. de Bergerac, and free to converse with Helen.

And yet, in the breast of one of the sages there beat a heart from which the pains and passions of youth had not yet been banished—a heart that ached with a keen anguish as its

owner watched those two figures seated in the shadow of the chestnut-tree. Mr. Jerningham had lived in society, and had learned the difficult art of conducting one argument with skill and judgment while another argument was being silently debated in his heart. He talked about Islamism, and did battle for his own convictions, and missed no chance of putting his opponent in the wrong; and yet all the time the inner voice was debating that other question.

"If I had been as free as this young man, could I have won that girl, with him for my rival?" he asked himself. "What gift has he that I do not possess—except youth? And is there really a charm in youth more divine than any grace of mind or polish of manner that belongs to a riper age? Is it only a physical charm—the charm of a smoother cheek or brighter eyes—or is it an indefinable freshness of mind and heart that constitutes the superiority? I do not think Helen de Bergerac the kind of woman to like a man less because there

are a few lines across his forehead and a few silver threads in his hair; but I know that there is a sympathy between her and this young man that does not exist between her and me. And yet I doubt if any ambitious youth of five-and-twenty can love as devotedly as a man of my age. It is only when he has proved the hollowness of everything else in life that a man is free to surrender himself entirely to the woman he loves."

Again and again during the six months of his lingering at Greenlands, Mr. Jerningham had told himself that his case would have been utterly hopeless, even if he had been free to woo his old friend's daughter. And yet he pined for his freedom; and there were times when he felt somewhat unkindly disposed towards the harmless lady at Hampton.

"What are we to each other but an incumbrance?" he asked himself. "If she had been more guilty, we might be free; she to marry Desmond, and I——"

And then Mr. Jerningham reflected upon the

Continental manner of marrying and giving in marriage. If he had been at liberty to ask for Helen's hand, what more likely than that the priceless boon would have been granted by the friend who loved him and believed in him? Theodore de Bergerac was of all men the most likely to bestow his daughter on a husband of mature age, since he himself had married a woman twenty years his junior, and had found perfect happiness in that union.

Mr. Jerningham fancied himself blest with this fair young wife, and pictured to himself the calm and blameless existence which he might have led with so sweet a companion. Oh, what a tranquil haven would this have been, after the storms he had tempted, the lightnings he had invited and defied!

"Of thorns men do not gather figs, nor of a bramble-bush gather they grapes," said the Divine Teacher. Mr. Jerningham remembered that solemn sentence. There are some precepts of Holy Writ that a man cannot put out of his memory, though he may have outlived by a

quarter of a century his faith in the creed they teach.

"I suppose I had my chance of perfect happiness at some moment of my life, and forfeited it," he said to himself. "Destiny is a bitter schoolmistress, and has no pity on the mistakes of her scholars."

CHAPTER X.

"L'OISEAU FUIT COMME LE BONHEUR."

EUSTACE refrained from opening the parcel given to him by his uncle until he found himself in his own room, in the solemn quiet of a rural midnight. Then, and then only, did he feel himself at liberty to enter upon a task which had a certain sanctity. It was but a mixed record of truth and fiction, this book which his guilty father had given to the world; but some part of his mother's life was interwoven with those pages; her brief dream of happiness was shut, as it were, between the leaves of the volumes, like flowers that have once been bright with colour and rich with perfume, and which one finds pale and scentless in a long-unopened book.

The book was called *The Disappointments*

of Dion: a Sequel to Dion, a Confession. By the same Author. This preservation in the second book of the name that had figured in the first seemed to indicate the autobiographical nature of both works. The hero of the *Disappointments* was the same being as the hero of the *Confession*—the same being, hardened and degraded by ten years of selfishness and dissipation. The Dion of the *Confession* had the affectation of cynicism, the tone of an Alcibiades who apes the philosophy of Diogenes. The Dion of the *Disappointments* was really cynical, and attempted to disguise his cynicism under an affectation of *bonhomie*.

Eustace sat till late into the night, reading —with unspeakable pain, with sorrow, anger, sympathy, mixed in his mind as he read. Yes, this book had been written by his father —there could be no doubt of that. The first volume contained his mother's story. It fitted into the record of the letters, and to the story told by Mrs. Willows. Idealized and poetized by the fancy of the hero, he read the history of

a girl's day-dream, and recognized in this poetized heroine the woman whose pensive face had been wont to brighten when it looked upon his. The story of a young student's passion for a tradesman's daughter was told with a certain grace and poetry. It is but an old story at best. It is always more or less the legend of Faust and Gretchen, and it needs a Göthe to elevate so simple a fable from the commonplace to the sublime.

The author of *Dion* described his Gretchen very prettily. It was a portrait by Greuse, with an occasional touch of Raphael.

To the study of this book Eustace Thorburn applied himself with intense earnestness of thought and purpose. The Sibylline volumes were not more precious to the sage who purchased them so dearly than was this egotistical composition to the man who had found a leaf from his mother's life in the heart of the book.

How much written here was the plain, unvarnished truth? how much the mere exercise

of a romantic fancy? That was the question upon which depended the whole value of the volumes.

On the one hand, it would seem scarcely likely that any man would publish to the world the story of his own wrong-doing, or anatomize his own heart for the pleasure of a novel-reading public. On the other hand, there was the fact that men have, in a perverted spirit of vanity, given to the press revelations of viler sins and more deliberate baseness than any transgression confessed by the author of *Dion*. Eustace remembered the Confessions of Jean Jacques Rousseau; and he told himself that there is no crime which the egotist does not think interesting when the criminal is himself. But the strongest evidence in support of the idea that this *Disappointments of Dion* was throughout a narration of real events lay in the fact that those pages which described the author's courtship of a tradesman's daughter formed an exact transcript of his mother's story, as Eustace had learned it. The quiet

sea-coast town, gayer in those days than now; the bookseller's shop; the stretch of yellow sand beyond the rocks; the dull, commonplace companion of the author's "divine C."; the time of year; the interval that elapsed between the brief courtship and the elopement—all corresponded exactly with the data of that sad history whose every detail was written upon Eustace Thorburn's heart.

Throughout the book, places and persons were indicated only by initials; and this alone imparted somewhat of an obsolete and Minerva-Press appearance to the volumes. This circumstance also gave further ground for the idea that there was in this book very little of absolute invention.

Eustace read the two slender volumes from beginning to end at a sitting. He began to read before midnight. The broad summer sunlight shone upon him, and the birds were singing loud in the woodland, when he closed the second volume. For him every page had an all-absorbing interest. The reading of this

book was like the autopsy of his father's mind and heart; and there was something of the surgeon's scientific scrutiny in the deliberate care with which he read.

If there were any good to be found in this book, he was prepared to set that good as a *per-contra* in the dread account of debtor and creditor which he kept against his unknown father. But he wanted to fathom the depths of evil in the mind of that nameless enemy. He wanted to ascertain the uttermost wrong this man had done him in the person of that dearer part of himself, his dead mother.

He read the book steadily through, pausing only to mark the passages which seemed to tell Celia Mayfield's story, and all passages which bore, however indirectly, upon that story.

It was half-past six when he read the last page; and half-past seven was M. de Bergerac's breakfast-hour. Happily, Mr. Thorburn was at that privileged age when a man can do without sleep, and find as much refreshment in

a few pails of cold water as ponderous middle age can derive from a long night's rest. So he made his toilet, and went down-stairs to the bright, pretty breakfast-room, little the worse for the studious occupation of his night.

Mr. Jerningham had wandered down by the water-side after leaving the cottage, and had seen the light in the secretary's window, and wondered what the young man was doing.

"In the throes of poetical composition, no doubt," thought the master of Greenlands. "How pleased he seemed to come back to these people; and with what a smile *she* welcomed him! And to think that if I were to offer every possession I have in this world, and my heart of hearts, and my pride, and my life into the bargain, I could not buy one such smile as that! I could have such smiles once for the asking; they shone upon me from the fairest faces, spontaneous and liberal as the sunlight; and I passed on, and did not cherish one of them to light my old age. Oh, surely there is some world in which we live our lives

again, enlightened by the follies of the past; some Swedenborgian heaven, in which the shadows of the things we love here are presented to us, and we move amongst them regenerate and spiritualized, and redeem the mistakes and errors of our earthly existence!"

Helen de Bergerac came in from the garden, with an apronful of flowers, as Eustace Thorburn entered the breakfast-room. And then came the arrangement of the flowers in old Wedgwood vases and old Worcester bowls, the clipping of stems, the plucking of stray leaves, the selections of dewy roses and jasmine, honeysuckle and geranium,—the most dangerous of all occupations for two people who would fain hide that secret which these two were trying to conceal from each other.

These two, however, behaved with supreme discretion. There was a dull pain in the heart of Eustace which made him more silent than usual. He could not ask the playful, frivolous questions, about garden and poultry-yard, aviary and greenhouse, Greek verbs or Latin verse-

making, the asking of which until now had been such an unfailing source of delight.

The long night-watching had saddened him; the brooding over his mother's history had brought the sense of the irremoveable stigma upon his name home to his mind with a new bitterness.

"Would this girl's father, with his Spanish pride of race and his pedigree of half a dozen centuries, ever bring himself to excuse that one shortcoming upon my part?" he asked himself. "If in all other respects I were the very suitor he would choose for his only child, could he forgive the bar-sinister which makes my shield unworthy to go side by side with his?"

And then the young poet remembered his poverty, and laughed at himself in very bitterness of heart for the folly which had permitted him to believe, even for one delusive moment, that Theodore de Bergerac would accept him for a son-in-law.

"Uncle Dan sees these things clearly," he

said to himself. "He has told me my duty, and I will do it."

Helen saw the cloud upon his face, and wondered what could have changed him so suddenly. Only last night he had seemed so gay, so happy. This morning he was silent and thoughtful; and something told her that his thoughts were sad.

"I fear you heard some unpleasant news while you were in town," she said, anxiously; "and yet last night you seemed so light-hearted."

"Light-headed, perhaps! There is a kind of intoxication in pleasant talk about the things one loves and believes in; and last night the very atmosphere was intoxicating. The faint new moon, and the flowers, and the river,—those things mount to one's brain. The morning is sacred to common-sense. Hope, faith, happiness, what are they but phantoms that vanish at cock-crow? Daylight ushers in the reign of worldly wisdom, and her rule is apt to seem hard."

"Does she seem such a hard mistress to you, Mr. Thorburn?"

"Yes; she shows me cruel truths in a cold, pitiless way."

Helen looked puzzled. She felt that the conversation was in some manner dangerous, and did not know whither any further question might drift her. So she wisely desisted from questioning, and fell back upon such safe subjects as the flowers and the birds. But every now and then she gave a little furtive look at Eustace Thorburn's grave face; and those furtive glances convinced her that he was unhappy.

M. de Bergerac came from his library before the arrangement of the vases was quite concluded. He was the earliest riser in his household, and came to the breakfast-table always refreshed and invigorated by upwards of an hour's hard reading.

"I have been looking over your note-books, Thorburn," he said; "you have done wonders —those extracts from the old Venetian manu-

scripts will be invaluable to me. You must have worked very closely during your absence."

"I did stick to my desk at the Museum pretty closely. But I am more than repaid if my extracts are likely to be useful."

"They are of the most precious kind. Where should I get such another secretary? You will be able to finish my book some day."

"Papa!" cried Helen, tenderly.

"Do not look at me so sadly, dear child! If I were to live to the age of Old Parr, the book would scarcely be finished. Thou knowest not how such a subject grows upon the writer—how he sees worlds on worlds opening before his dazzled eyes—ever distant, ever new—widening into infinity. Everywhere it is the wealth of man's imagination which astounds, which terrifies him; and he asks himself with shame and humiliation, of the most profound, is it *this* which I have set myself to catalogue? Is it *this* that I think can be numbered and summarized in my short span? In the traditions of the Rabbins what a universe! In the faith

of Zoroaster, what worlds unexplored—unexplorable! What fond fantastic dreams, what sublime depths of thought, what grandeur of faith, in the pious mysteries of Brahma and Buddha! Every race peoples invisible worlds; and in each new voyage into the realms of untutored fancy the shadow-world stretches wider before our gaze. Gods and demons, angels of good and of evil, assume shapes more gigantic, attributes more awful. Hell sinks to depths unfathomable. Heaven recedes from the weak grasp of mortal intellect. Stricken, distraught, the weak soul flees aghast before those barbaric wonders, and takes refuge in the haven of Christian faith. Ah, how simple, how beautiful, after the gigantic demonology of the East, seems the pure and perfect Redeemer of the West—beginning with the martyrdom of the magnanimous Prometheus, the bondage of the mythic Herakles, culminating in the Atonement of the Divine Christ!"

And here M. de Bergerac dilated upon one of his favourite theories, the dual gospel of Western

Paganism and Christianity; and fought with Eustace Thorburn in support of his pet hypothesis, to the effect that Grecian fable was only a distortion of Bible-history, and the stories of Prometheus and Herakles mere rude foreshadowings of the purer and holier story of man's Redeemer.

They fought out the battle of comparative mythology; Eustace was of the two the more earnest Christian. M. de Bergerac went every Sunday to a pretty little Roman Catholic chapel, half hidden in a rustic garden, beyond Windsor; but his faith would scarcely have satisfied the requirements of an orthodox director. The younger man had passed dryshod through the boundless ocean of mythic lore to that haven of which his patron had spoken—that harbour of rest for the wandering soul, where passionate desire to solve the great enigma is exchanged for the simple faith of childhood. From his mother's lips Eustace had learned that tender religion of the heart which Paganism tries in vain to match with the

hard logic of a Plato, or the moral axioms of a Confucius. To this faith he had clung even more fondly since his mother's death. If not for his own sake, for hers he must needs have been a believer. Where else could he find hope and comfort in the thought of her sad pilgrimage? Here her weak feet had travelled by hard and crooked ways—here the burden laid on her had been cruel and heavy. As an earthly destiny, with no hope of compensation beyond the regions of earth, Celia's life would have seemed all bitterness—the vengeance decreed by a pitiless Nemesis, rather than the chastisement of a merciful God. But if beyond the sad end of that sorrowful journey the traveller found rest and forgiveness in regions unimaginable to the earth-burdened spirit, the pilgrimage seemed no longer hard, the burden no longer heavy; the enigma of all earthly sorrows received its answer.

This was the hope dear to the heart of Celia Mayfield's son; and for this faith he fought sturdily in conversational battles with his pa-

tron, refusing to yield one inch of that ground on which the divinity of his Master's mission rested. He would accept for that pure Teacher no first-cousinship with Buddha or Confucius—no misty resemblance to Zagreus or Dionysus, Prometheus or Herakles—no intellectual relationship with Zoroaster or Mahomet. For the truth and the whole truth of the gospel which he had read at his mother's knee, he was resolute and unflinching.

If he had been the most jesuitical of schemers, he could not have better forwarded his cause with Helen de Bergerac than by this championship of the true faith. She too had learned her best and earliest lessons from a mother's lips, and the philosophical breadth of view presented to her always in her father's conversation had in nowise spoiled the simplicity of those first lessons. She heard her father's rationalistic talk with unchanging regret; and hoped always for the day in which he should come to see these things in the same mysterious light which made them so sacred and beautiful to her.

To-day Eustace was more than usually earnest. Was he not about to make his first great sacrifice in proof of his faith? Not on the shrine of Pagan honour was he about to lay down his happiness, but on the altar of Christian duty.

He determined that there should be little time lost in the completion of that bitter sacrifice. The knife should be sharpened at once for the slaughter of Isaac. And in this case, there was, alas! no hope of Divine interposition.

CHAPTER XI.

"THE DISAPPOINTMENTS OF DION."

The secretary went out into the park, and down to the neglected shrubbery-walk that wound along the river bank. This was the loneliest and wildest part of Mr. Jerningham's domain, and solitude was what Eustace Thorburn wanted to-day. He had brought with him, not his own poem, but those two slender volumes which contained the history of his mother's youth, and in the composition whereof he beheld the hand of his unknown father. He wanted to read this book a second time, even more slowly and thoughtfully than he had read it the first time. He wanted, if it were possible, to plumb the very depths of his father's heart.

The still summer day and the woodland

solitude were well fitted for meditation. Eustace walked about a mile and a half from M. de Bergerac's cottage before he opened his book. The seat which he chose was a rude rustic bench, in a hollow of the bank, close to the edge of the river—a seat which at high tide was half covered by the water. The rugged sloping bank rose behind the rough wooden bench. The young man leaned lazily against the short burnt grass of the bank as he read.

The portion of the book most interesting to this one reader was that which told, in terms half cynical, half playful, of the writer's brief delusion—the little Arcadian comedy of rustic life with the girl whose heart he had broken, and the bitter tragedy in which it ended.

The scene depicted in this portion of the story was wild and mountainous; snow-crowned hills formed the background of the landscape. The sea was close at hand; all was gigantic, rugged, uncivilized. Yet there was no mention of foreign customs or foreign people. There was a certain familiarity in everything,

that was scarcely compatible with the idea that this rustic dwelling-place of Dion's was remote from England; and Eustace decided that the scene of the story must have lain within the British dominions. The description of the landscape might apply to many spots in Scotland, in Wales, or even in Ireland. Clue to the exact locality there seemed, on first consideration, none; so faint were the indications, so general the features of the scene. The record had been evidently written long after the occurrences described. Only the cold light of memory illumined the pages; after-disappointments had embittered the spirit of the writer, and lent bitterness even to memory. It was, in very truth, the confession of a man infinitely worse than the author of *Dion*.

The following were the pages which told Eustace how rudely his mother's brief dream had been broken:

"I think we had scarcely been a month at H. H. before I began to discover how profound

was my mistake. Tenderness and affection, a fond admiration of my mental attributes that approached idolatry—these my poor C. gave me in liberal measure. But the higher tribute of self-abnegation she could not give me. Hers was one of those natures which are not made for sacrifice. The grandeur of heroic souls was wanting in this gentle breast. In the haven of a domestic circle, safely sheltered from the storms of fate, to a man whose days were occupied in that hard struggle for life which the world calls business, and who asked of the gods nothing brighter than a household angel, this dear girl would have seemed the sweetest of wives. I think of her always with supreme tenderness; but I cannot forget the weariness that crept upon me when I found how little sympathy there was between us.

"From all loud reproaches, even from the appearance of grief, she for a long time refrained. But I could see that she was not happy; and this fact was in itself a torture to a man of sensitive nature and irritable nerves.

A look, a half-stifled sigh, ever and anon told me that I had not found a companion, but a victim. The smile whose angelic sweetness had charmed me in the bookseller's lovely daughter had faded, nay almost vanished. It was like some mediæval legend: the supernal beauty met by the knight in the haunted darkness of an enchanted forest is transformed into a dull, earthly spouse; and the foolish knight, who had ridden home to his castle with a divinity, awakens to find himself mated to a peasant-girl.

"This was my first and most bitter disappointment. I look back now and ask myself what it was that I had hoped, and what substantial ground there had been for my hopes. Because this poor girl had a face like Guido's Beatrice Cenci, because she praised my book in her low musical voice and simple commonplace phrases, I must needs fancy that I had found the Ægeria of my dreams, the companion-spirit, the inspiring and elevating influence which every poet seeks in the object of his love!

"I used to think my own thoughts very grand in those days. There were moments in which I yearned and hungered for some sharer in my dreams. I was steeped to the lips in Shelley's poetry; I wanted to find a Cynthia,—

'A second self, far dearer and more fair.
. . . . . .
Hers too were all my thoughts: ere yet endowed
With music and with light, their fountains flowed
In poesy; and her still, earnest face,
Pallid with feelings which intensely glowed
Within, was turned on mine with speechless grace
Watching the hopes which there her heart had learned to trace.

In me, communion with this purest being
Kindled intenser zeal, and made me wise
In knowledge, which in hers mine own mind seeing,
Left in the human world few mysteries:
How without fear of evil or disguise
Was Cynthia! What a spirit, strong and mild,
Which death, or pain, or peril could despise,
Yet melt in tenderness!'

This was the bright ideal of my dream; and instead of this, what had I found? A gentle girl, whose education had scarcely outstepped the boundary-line of the all-abridging Pinnock,

and who consumed hours in secret weeping because she had offended her father, a small trader in a small country town, and had forfeited her social position in that miserably narrow world which was the beginning and end of her universe. Alas for my fond delusions! Where was the

> 'spirit strong and mild,
> Which death, or pain, or peril could despise?'

"There were, indeed, moments in which some pretty poetical thought slipped between my poor girl's 'scarlet-threaded lips;' but she was too timid by nature to give voice to her brightest fancies, and I saw noble thoughts in her deep eyes which her lips never learned to translate. Sometimes, in the solemn stillness of a moonlight night, when we had wandered along some rugged mountain-path, and reached a spot whence we could look down upon the pathless waste of waters, which of all spectacles in Nature's great theatre most affected this untaught girl, I could see that her mind took a kind of inspiration from the grandeur of the

scene, and that the littleness of self was for the moment put away from her. Are there not, indeed, brief pauses of mental intoxication, in which the spirit releases itself from its dull mortal bondage, and floats starward on the wings of inspiration?

'If we could stay here for ever,' she said to me one night, when we sat in the little classic temple on D. P., looking down from that craggy headland upon the barren sea; 'if this light could shine always, with those deep, solemn shadows sleeping under the shelter of the rocks, I think that one might forget all that is hardest in the world. Here I remember nothing except that you and I are together in the moonlight. Past, present, and future seem to melt into this hour. I can almost fancy the rocks and the waves feeling a sort of happiness like this—a sense of delight when the moon shines upon them. It is difficult to think that the waves feel *nothing* when they come creeping along the sands with that half-stealthy, half-joyous motion, like the nymphs you talk of,

dancing in secret, afraid to awaken the sea-god.'

'If you had lived in the days when there were gods upon the earth, C., I think you would have fallen in love with Poseidon.'

"She was looking out across the sea, with a dreamy light in her eyes, and her lips half parted, as if she had indeed seen a band of snowy-kirtled nymphs dancing on the broad stretch of sand in the shadow of the headland.

'Poss—who?' she asked, wonderingly.

'Poseidon; one of the elder sons of Time and the Great Mother, the sea-god of whom you spoke just now. I think if you had lived in the Golden Age, you would have met Tyro's lover, and loved him, as she did. I never saw such a passionate fondness for the sea as you betray in every look and word.'

'Yes,' she said; 'I have always loved the sea with a feeling that I have been unable to express, as if there were indeed a human heart in all that wide ocean. When I am—when you have been away longer than usual,

and I feel lonely, I come here, and sit for hours watching the waves roll slowly in, and thinking.'

"And here her voice trembled a little, and I knew that the thoughts of which she spoke were gloomy ones. Thus it was with us ever. For a moment she seemed a companion, a kindred spirit; but in the next we were back again in the old wearisome channel, and I felt myself stifled by the atmosphere of B.

"Her utter want of education made a gulf between us which even love could not span. The fact that she was intelligent, appreciative, was not sufficient to render companionship possible between us. Those regions which for me were densely peopled with bright and wondrous images were for her blank and empty as the desert plains of Central Africa. Pretty poetical fancies—the wild flowers of the intellectual world—took quick root in her shallow mind; but the basis for deep thoughts was wanting. I grew weary of conversation in which my part was almost a monologue, weary

of long *tête-à-têtes* which left me no richer by one wise thought or amusing paradox. Day by day I fell back more completely upon my books for company. The poor child perceived this with evident distress. One day she asked me, with tones and looks most piteous, why I no longer talked to her, as I had once talked, about the books I was reading, the subjects that I had chosen for future poetic treatment. I told her frankly that it was tiresome to me to talk to her of things with which she had evidently no sympathy.

'Indeed,' she cried, 'you are mistaken. I sympathize with all your thoughts. I can picture to myself all your fancies. The worlds which you tell me of, and the people—the strange, wild worship of those strange people—I can fancy them and see them. They are a little dim and shadowy to me; but I *do* see them. And I so dearly love to hear you talk. I cannot discuss these things with you as a clever person would, and I cannot tell you half I think and feel about them; but to sit by you as you read

or write, to watch you till you grow tired of your books, and look up and talk to me, is perfect happiness for me—my only happiness now.'

"Here her voice grew tremulous, and she broke down in the usual hopeless manner.

'If you would only teach me to understand the things that interest you, if you would let me read your books, I should be a fitter companion for you,' she said, presently.

"I groaned aloud at the hopelessness of this idea. I was to teach this poor child to be my second self, to train her into sympathy—to grow my own Cynthia! I envied Shelley his happier fate, and that bright spirit which

'Walked as free as light the clouds among.'

But Shelley had made his mistake, and had drained the bitter cup of disappointment before he found his fair ideal.

"I know there are men who have educated their wives, but I never could understand this idea of the lover lined with the pedagogue. C. asked to read the books I was reading; *id*

cst, K. O. Müller, in the original German; the *Orestea*, in the original Greek; *A Course of Hindoo Tradition*, published by the Society for the Propagation of Arianism; De Barante's *Dukes of Burgundy;* and the *Old Ballads of France*, with an occasional dip into Catullus, Juvenal, Lucretius, or Horace. These were the books which I was reading, in a very desultory, unprofitabe manner; for the weakness of my life has been inconstancy, even in the matter of books. A few pages of one, a random peep between the leaves of another, a hop, skip, and a jump between Oriental legend and Platonic philosophy, finding everywhere some point of comparison, some forced resemblance. I told my poor dear C. that anything like teaching on my part would be an impossibility. However, by way of satisfying the poor child's thirst for knowledge, I sent a list of books to a London bookseller, including a few simple elementary works and my favourite English poets; and this little collection I presented to C. I found she had read

all the poets, in her father's library, and was indeed as familiar with them as I myself; but she received the books from me with an appearance of real delight. This was the first present I made her. It would have been a pleasure to me to lavish costly gifts upon her; but it was a pleasure more exquisite to withhold them, and to be sure that no adventitious aid had assisted me in the winning of her love.

"I think that most wearisome institution, the honeymoon, must have been inaugurated by some sworn foe to matrimony, some vile misogamist, who took to himself a wife in order to discover, by experience, the best mode of rendering married life a martyrdom.

"Enlightened by experience, this miserable wretch said to himself, 'I will introduce a practice which, in the space of one short month, shall transform the doating bridegroom into the indifferent husband, the idolatrous lover into the submissive expiator of a fatal mistake. For one month I, by my invisible agent, Fashion, will bind together bride and bride-

groom in dread imprisonment. Impalpable shall be their fetters; fair and luxurious shall be their prison; complacent and respectful shall be the valet and abigail, the lackeys and grooms who act as their gaolers; and in that awful bondage they shall have no worse chastisement than each other's society. Chained together like the wretched convicts of Toulon, they shall pace to and fro their lonely exercise-ground, until the bright sky above and the bright earth around them shall seem alike hateful. They shall be for ever plumbing each other's souls, and for ever finding shallows; for ever gauging each other's minds, to be for ever disappointed by the result. And not till they have learned thoroughly to detest each other shall the order of release be granted, and the fiat pronounced: You know each other's emptiness of mind and shallowness of heart; go forth and begin your new existence, profoundly wretched in the knowledge that your miserable lives must be spent together.'

"I had planned and plotted this residence at

H. H., hoping to find a glimpse of Eden in this loneliness amid Nature's splendour, 'with one fair spirit for my minister.' If I had been fond of sport, I might have found amusement for my days, and might have returned at night to my nest to meet an all-sufficient welcome in my love's happy smile. But I was at this time a student, still suffering from the effects of overwork at O——, and a little from the disappointments of my career, hyper-sensitive, *tant soit peu* irritable; and C.'s companionship bored me. This was a crisis of my life, in which I needed the sustaining influence of a stronger mind than my own. Even her affection became kind of torment. She was too anxious to please me, too painfully conscious of my slightest show of weariness, too apprehensive of losing my regard. I could almost have said with Bussy Rabutin, "*Je ne pouvais plus souffrir ma maîtresse, tant elle m'aimait.*'

"It is needless to dwell upon this story of disappointment, that was so keen as to verge upon remorse. I hated myself for my folly; I

was angry with this poor girl because she could neither be happy nor render me so. If there were any breach of honour involved in my broken promise, I paid dearly for my dishonour. And *that* kind of promise is never intended to be believed: it is the easy excuse which a faithful knight provides for his lady-love. Let me be guilty of perjury, that you may still be perfect, he says; and the damsel accepts the chivalrous pretence.

"With this poor child, unhappily, there was no such thing as reason. Worldly wisdom, the necessities of position, the ties of family, were unknown in her vocabulary.

'I have broken my father's heart,' she said, in that *larmoyante* tone which became almost habitual to her. And thereupon, of course, I felt myself a wretch. At this period of my life I sometimes caught myself wondering what would have become of Faust if he and Gretchen had spent six months in a rustic cottage amongst the Hartz mountains. Surely he would have languished to return to his

books, to his parchments, to his crucibles and mathematical instruments, his Nostradamus, and his prosy, insufferable Wagner; anything to escape that lugubrious maiden.

"And yet what can be a prettier picture than Gretchen plucking the petals of her rose, or my poor C., as I first saw her, bending with rapt countenance over my own book? Oh, fatal book, that brought sorrow to her, weariness unspeakable to me!

"If C. had been reasonable, she could have found little cause to complain of me. I had no intention of breaking the tie so lightly made. That I was responsible for that step, which must colour the remainder of *her* existence, I never for a moment forgot. All I rebelled against was the notion that my future life was to be overshadowed by the funereal tint which her melancholy vision imparted to everything she looked upon. At one time I conceived the idea that she was disquieted by the uncertainty of the future, and I hastened to relieve her mind upon this point.

'My darling girl,' I said, with real earnestness, 'you cannot surely doubt that your future will be my first care. Come what may, your prosperity, your happiness indeed,—so far as mortal man can command happiness,—shall be assured. I hope you do not doubt this.'

"She looked at me with that dull despair which of late I had more than once remarked in her countenance.

'H.,' she said, 'shall I ever be your wife?"

"I turned my face away from her in silence, wrung her poor little cold hands in my own, and left her without a word. This was a question which I could not answer, a question which she should not have asked.

"That evening, as I walked alone in the dreary solitude under the cliffs, a sudden thought flashed into my mind.

'Good heavens,' I thought, 'how completely I have put myself into this girl's power by my folly; and what a hold she has upon me, if she knew how to use it, or were base enough to trade upon the advantages of her position!'

"Reflection told me that it was not in C. to make a mean use of power which I had so unwittingly placed in her hands. But I laughed aloud when I considered my shortsighted folly in allowing myself to drop into such a dangerous position.

"When we next met, C. was pallid as death, and I could see that she had devoted the interval to tears. I keenly felt her silent woe, and with my whole heart pitied her childish disappointment. Until this occasion I had not for a moment supposed that she cherished any hope of such folly on my part as an utter sacrifice of my liberty. It was this of which I thought, and not my position in the world. Had I been inclined for matrimony, I would as willingly have married this tradesman's daughter as a countess. It was the hateful tie, the utter abnegation of man's divinest gift of freedom, the mortgage of my future, from which I shrank with abhorrence.

'My dear love,' I said to C., as I tried to kiss away the traces of her tears, 'I mean to

love you all my life, if you will let me. And do you think I shall love you any less because I have not asked the Archbishop of Canterbury's permission to adore you? And then I was guilty of that customary commonplace about 'a marriage in the sight of Heaven,' which has been especially invented for such occasions.

"After this I tried to indoctrinate her with the philosophy of the purest of men and most lawless of poets. I entreated her to rend custom's mortal chain,

'And walk as free as light the clouds among.'

But the exalted mind which can rise superior to the bondage of custom had not been given to this poor girl. She always went back to the one inevitable argument, 'I have broken my father's heart.'

"It was quite in vain that I endeavoured to make her see the ethics of life from a nobler stand-point. Her thoughts revolved always in the same narrow circle—B——, that odious watering-place, and the humdrum set of shop-

keepers whom she had known from her childhood.

'You do not know how my father is respected in the town,' she said, piteously, when I reminded her of the insignificance of such a place as B—— when weighed against the rest of the universe, and ventured to suggest that the esteem and approbation of B—— did not constitute the greatest sacrifice ever made by woman.

'As for the respect which these good people feel for your father, what does it amount to, my dear love?' I asked. 'A man lives in some sleepy country town twenty years or so, and pays his debts, and attends the services of his parish church with unbroken regularity, and dies in the odour of sanctity; or else suddenly throws the mental powers of his fellow-townsmen off their balance by forging a bill of exchange, or murdering his wife and children, or setting his house on fire with a view to cheating the insurance companies. What is the respect of such people worth? It is given to the man who pays his tradesmen and goes

to church. He may be the veriest tyrant, or hypocrite, or fool in the universe, and they respect him all the same. He may have squared the circle, or solved the problem of perpetual motion, or invented the steam-engine, or originated the process of vaccination, and if he fails to pay his butcher and baker, and to attend his church, they will withhold their respect. Greatness of intellect, or of conduct, is utterly beyond their comprehension. They would consider Columbus a doubtful character, and Raleigh a disreputable one.'

"Upon this I saw symptoms of tears, and timeously departed. The dear child took everything *au grand sérieux*. Oh! how I languished for the graceful badinage of Kensington Gore, the careless talk of my clubs—anything rather than this too poetical loneliness!

"I planned my future that night. Some pretty rustic cottage for C. in the hilly country between Hampstead and Barnet, within an easy ride of town, where my own head-quarters must needs be when not abroad. I had fancied

that C. and I could have travelled together, but I found her far too *triste* a companion for Continental wanderings. She was too ignorant to appreciate scenes which owe their best charm to association, and thus utterly unable to sympathize with the emotions which those scenes might excite in the breast of her fellow-traveller; nor had she the animal spirits which render the ignorance of some women amusing. She was, in short, the genius of home rather than the goddess of poetry; and I resolved to establish a home over which she might preside, a haven from the storms of life, whither I might go to have oil poured into my wounds, and whence I might return to the world refreshed and comforted.

"I pictured to myself this home, as fair as taste and wealth could make it. No flowers that my hand could lavish would have been wanting to adorn this poor girl's pathway. I have no reproach to make against myself here. There are few lives happier than hers would have been, if she had been content to entrust

herself to my guidance. But my liberty was a treasure which I could not bring myself to resign.

"All might, perhaps, have gone well with us but for one unlucky turn of affairs; an accident in which a fatalist would have recognized the hand of Destiny, but in which I saw only one of those foolish *contretemps* which assist the further entanglement of that tangled skein called Life.

"One day, in a sudden fit of disgust with myself, my books, my companion, and the universe, I left the house, and went on foot in search of some wandering Mephistopheles with whom to barter my soul for a fresh sensation.

"I was five-and-twenty. My *première jeunesse*—the bloom on the peach, the down on the butterfly's wing, the fresh dews of morning, the glory of the sunshine—had been wasted. The world called me a young man—young because bitter thoughts had not yet set their mark upon my brow. They were only inscribed upon my heart. I surveyed the horizon of my

life, and saw that the stars had all vanished. There was only the dull equal gray of a sunless afternoon. It is impossible to imagine a prospect more completely blank than that on which I looked. There is no pleasure known to mankind that I had not tasted, to satiety. The baser, as well as the more refined—I had tried them all. In the records of Roman dissipation Suetonius or Gibbon could suggest little —except some darker vices—which I had not tried, and found wanting. I had slept under the reticulated lilies of Antinöus, and supped upon beef-steaks and porter with the gladiators of Commodus, in the modern guise of Tom Spring and Ben Caunt. Love had been powerless to give me happiness. Friendship I had been too wise to test. My friends were the friends of the rich Timon. I did not value them so highly as to put their friendship through the crucible of pretended poverty. I took them for what they were worth; and my sole cause of complaint against them was that they failed to amuse me. My life was one long yawn—and

if I still lived, it was only because I knew not what purgatory of perpetual *ennui* might await me on Acheron's further shore. Could I have been certain of such an Inferno as Dante's—all action, passion, fever, excitement—I should gladly have exchanged the placid wretchedness of life for the stirring horrors of that dread under-world.

"On this one particular day, when most of all I felt the utter weariness of my existence, I wandered purposeless along the mountain-side —thinking of those rugged steeps of Hellas, which the scene recalled—and scarcely knew whither my footsteps took me, till I suddenly found myself in a scene that was very familiar, and on a spot which, though not by any means remote from my own eyrie, I had hitherto avoided.

"I was on the landward slope of the mountain; below me lay a lake, and between my stand-point and the water rose curling wreaths of blue smoke from the chimneys of a house which I knew very well.

"It was the hunting-lodge of E. T., a man who was, if not my friend, at least one of my oldest acquaintances; a man between whom and myself there reigned that easy-going familiarity which passes current for friendship. We had been partners at whist, had been in love with the same women, *de par le haut monde* and *de par le bas monde*. We had bought horses of each other; had cheated each other, more or less unconsciously, in such dealing; had helped each other to break the bank at a Palais-Royal gaming-table; had been concerned together in an opera-ball riot one Easter with the D. of H. and certain Parisian notabilities of the Boulevard du Gand. If this be not friendship, I know not what is.

"The sight of those blue wreaths of smoke; the remembrance of the riot in the Rue Lepelletier; the little suppers at the Rocher and the Trois Frères; the wit, the wine, the fever of the blood that for the time being is almost happiness—stirred my senses with a faint thrill of pleasure.

'If T. is there, I will ask him to dine with me,' I thought; 'C. must accustom herself to receive my friends, or to let me receive them without her. I am suffering from the Londoner's nostalgie; I languish for the air of the club-houses and the Ring. It will be something to hear the newest scandals, fresh from the lips of E. T., who is a notorious gossip and *mauvais diseur*.'

"I had some reason for concluding that T. was stopping at his place. The smoke gave evidence that the house was inhabited, and I knew that in his absence the place was generally shut up, and left in the charge of a shepherd, who lived in a wretched shanty further down the valley. My friend's finances were as slender as his lineage was noble. He claimed a direct descent from the Plantagenets, and was never out of the hands of the Jews.

'They are taking it out of me on account of that nasty knack of my ancestors, who raised money by the extraction of the teeth of Israel,' he said. 'But we have changed all that. Isaac

of York has the best of it now-a-days, and draws the teeth of the Giaour!'

"I turned aside from the narrow path skirting the mountain, and walked down the slope towards E. T.'s *pied-à-terre*. I was absurdly pleased at the idea of seeing a man whose character I thoroughly despised, and whose death I should have heard of without so much as a passing regret.

"In my utter weariness of myself and my own thoughts, I cared not in what cloaca I found a harbour of refuge. The gate of the small domain swung loosely on its hinges. I pushed it open, and walked across the small lawn, bordered by shrubberies of fir and laurel. As I neared the porch, I saw the red glow of a fire shining in one of the lower windows, and was welcomed by a yapping chorus of lap-dogs, whose bark sounded shrill through the open door. There was no need for ceremony in this wild region; and even if I had wished to stand upon punctilio, there was neither bell nor knocker whereby I might have demanded ad-

mittance. I walked straight into the hall, or lobby—the former title is too grandiose for so small a chamber—and was immediately struck by the change which had come over the scene since I had looked upon it some twelve months before.

"It was then a rude chaos of gunnery, fishing-tackle, single-sticks, fencers' masks, boxing-gloves, plastrons, pipes, greatcoats, leather gaiters, fishing-boots, mackintoshes, and horse-cloths; nauseous with the odour of stale tobacco, and dangerous by the occupation of savage dogs. It was now dainty as a lady's boudoir: the floor bright with scarlet sheepskins, the walls gay with French prints. A velvet curtain half-shrouded the door of my friend's dining-room, just revealing a peep of the bright picture within—a table spread for luncheon, with snowy linen and sparkling glass. Half a dozen little yapping dogs issued from this room, and assailed me with shrill rancour. Not such specimens of the canine race had I before beheld in this mountain retreat. My friend T.

ever affected the biggest and roughest of the species. Lancashire-bred mastiffs, Danish wolf-hounds—the very Titans of the canine race from Mount St. Bernard or Newfoundland. These little creatures were the apoplectic descendants of that royal race which was cradled on the knees of Castlemain and Portsmouth, swaddled in the purple of Charles. Among these appeared a couple of russet-coated pugs, with negro features, swart visages, and short, bandy legs.

"Amidst the clamour of these creatures my entrance was unheard. I stooped down to examine the brutes, and was amused to perceive that the collar of one of the spaniels was the daintiest toy of filigree gold and mosaic.

'Has my friend turned *petit maitre?*' I asked myself.

"A second glance showed me a name upon the collar—Carlitz.

"Carlitz! Hast thou not read, oh! gentle reader, Eastern stories that tell how, by a

magician's wand, a fairy palace has risen suddenly in the midst of the barren desert, with birds singing, and fountains dancing in the sunlight; and among the fountains, and flowers, and birds, and barbarously-splendid colonnades, tripping across the tesselated floors, there comes something more beautiful than tropical bird or flower?

"The princess of the fairy tale—the Orient personified, with all its languid loveliness, its intoxicating sweetness, its colour and music, and sunshine and perfume—melted into one divine human creature.

"This is what the name upon the dog's collar did for me. It was the arch-enchanter's wand, evoking a goddess, in that bleak valley where I had hoped only to find a commonplace acquaintance.

"Carlitz! Shall I try to describe her—to describe the indescribable? Thou knowest her, kind reader; on thee, too, has she shone; for not to have seen her is to be a slave so dull that I would not think this book should fall

into such unworthy hands. I will say of her what Lysippus said of Athens:

> 'Hast not seen Carlitz, then thou art a log;
> Hast seen and not been charmed, thou art an ass.'

Or if, by reason of absence in far-distant lands, thou hast not seen her, picture to thyself the fairest princess of thy childish fairy lore, place her on a mortal stage, the cynosure of a thousand eyes, the idol of innumerable hearts, the topic of incalculable tongues, the gossip of uncountable newspapers, or, in one word—THE FASHION; endow her with a voice of the rarest power and richness; gift her with smiles that bewitch the fancy and accents that enthrall the soul; surround her with all the loveliest objects art ever devised or taste selected—and thou hast some faint image of that supernal being whom men call Carlitz.

"She lives still—still walks 'a form of life and light,' which, seen, becomes 'a part of sight;' but the first glory of her loveliness has departed—the rich, ripe voice has lost some touch of its old music. She is still Carlitz,

and to say this is to say that she is fairer than all the rest of womankind; but she is no longer the Carlitz of those days when Plancus was consul, and the Bonbonnière Opera-house was in its glory."

CHAPTER XII.

"INFINITE RICHES IN A LITTLE ROOM."

"I DREW aside the *portière* and looked into the room. She was there—Carlitz—nestling in a deep easy-chair, with that perfect arm—whose rounded line was accentuated by the tight-fitting sleeve of her violet silk dress—flung above her head in an attitude expressive of weariness. She was not alone. In a chair almost as comfortable as her own sat a portly gentleman of middle age, upon whose handsome countenance good-nature had set a stamp unmistakeable even by the shallowest observer. This gentleman was happily no stranger to me. I had met him in London, and knew him as the guide, philosopher, friend, and financial agent of Madame Carlitz; at once the Talleyrand and the Fould of that fair despot.

"The divinity arched her eyebrows in lazy surprise as I crossed the threshold.

'I really believe it is some one we know, H.,' she said to her friend, with delightful insolence.

"Mr. H. received me with more cordiality. I had seen a good deal of him in London during the previous season. E. T. and he were sworn allies. H. had been lieutenant in a regiment of the line, and, after wasting a small patrimony, had sold his commission and turned stage-player. His intimates called him Captain H. and Gentleman H., and he was a man who, in the whole of his careless career, had neither lost a friend nor made an enemy. To Madame Carlitz he was invaluable. The divinity had of late years taken it into her splendid mind to set up a temple of her own, whereby the little Sheppard's Alley Theatre, the most battered old wooden box that ever held a metropolitan audience, had been transformed, at the cost of some thousands, into a fairy temple of cream-coloured panelling, and

white-satin hangings, powdered with golden butterflies; and was now known to the fashionable world, whose carriages and cabs blocked Sheppard's Alley and overflowed into Wild's Corner, as the Royal Bonbonnière Opera House.

"Here Carlitz had sung and acted in delicious little operettas, imported from her native shores, to the delight of the world in general —always excepting those stupid people, the builders, and decorators, and upholsterers who had effected the transformation that made Sheppard's Alley and Wild's Corner the haunt of rank and fashion, and who had not received any pecuniary reward for their labours. To keep these people at bay, or, it is possible, to reduce their claims to something like reason, Madame Carlitz employed my friend H., who of all men was best adapted to pour oil upon the stormy ocean of a creditor's mind. He was the enchantress's *alter ego*, opening and sifting her letters, arranging her starring engagements, choosing her pieces, managing her

theatre, and receiving, with imperturbable temper, the torrents of her wrath when she was pleased to be angry. Nor were the proprieties outraged by an alliance so pure. H. was one of those men who are by nature fatherly—nay, almost motherly—in their treatment of women. No scandal had ever tarnished his familiar name. He had that tender, half-quixotic gallantry which is never allied with vice. He was the idol of old women and children, the pride of a doting mother, and the sovereign lord of a commonplace little woman whom he had taken for his wife.

"It was to this gentleman that I owed my right to approach Madame Carlitz. E. T. had obtained my admission to the side-scenes of the Bonbonnière, and had induced H. to present me to the lovely manageress, who was unapproachable as royalty. My introduction obtained for me only some ten minutes' converse with the presiding genius of the temple; but so supreme an honour was even this small privilege, that E. T. hastened to borrow a couple

of hundred from me while my gratitude was yet warm.

"It will be seen, therefore, that I had little justification for intruding on the lady now, beyond the loneliness of the country in which I found her, and the primitive habits there obtaining.

"After I had been a second time presented by H.—the lady having quite forgotten my presentation in Sheppard's Alley—madame received me with more warmth than she had deigned to evince for me in the green-room of the Bonbonnière.

'These hills are so dreadfully dreary, and we are so glad to see any one who can give us news,' she said, with agreeable candour.

"And then H. explained how it fell out that I met them there. Madame had been knocked-up with the season—six new operettas, the lovely *prima donna* singing in two pieces every night, and *never* disappointing her public, which master this fair Carlitz served faithfully and constantly throughout her career—and the

doctors had ordered change of scene and quiet —no Switzerland, no Italy, no German spa, but a sheltered hermitage, far from the busy haunts of men and the halting-places of stage-coaches.

"On hearing this E. T. had offered his mountain-shanty — poor accommodation, but scenery and air unmatchable in any other spot of earth. Madame Carlitz had been enraptured by the idea. E. T.'s hut was the place of places. She felt herself refreshed and invigorated by the very thought of the mountains and the sea. She would wait for no preparations, no fuss. She would take her own maid and a couple of women for the house—servants in those mountain-districts must be such barbarous creatures—and Parker, her butler, and a page or so, and a dozen or two trunks, and her favourite dogs, and her own particular phaeton and ponies, and her piano, and nothing more. Mr. and Mrs. H. must, of course, go with her, to keep house, and to write to people in London, and prevent the possibility of her being pursued by bills and tiresome letters, and so on.

"H. consented to this, and arranged the journey with infinite patience and good-humour, suppressing the unnecessary adjuncts of the convoy, and reducing the luggage to limits that were almost within the bounds of reason. All this he told me, as we strolled on the lawn before dinner.

'She—well, she very nearly swore at me when I told her she mustn't bring her piano,' said Mr. H.; 'a concert grand, you know, about seven feet long. And then she stood out for bringing her man Parker, the greatest thief and scoundrel in Christendom; and the ponies and a groom, who sits behind her when she drives; but I fought my ground inch by inch, sir, and here we are. Madame has her own maid, and her lap-dogs; I have hired a stout country-girl for the kitchen, and we do the rest of the housework ourselves. And, egad, madame likes it. She dusts and arranges the rooms, and so forth, with her own hands, and sings and dances about the house more deliciously than ever she sang or danced on the

boards of the Bonbonnière. She has developed a genius for cooking: puts on a big holland apron, and tosses an omelet, or fries a dish of trout, with the art of a Vatel, and the grace of a Hebe. I never knew half her fascination until we came here; and I think, if her London admirers could see her, they would be more madly in love with her than ever.'

"They invited me to dine. Mrs. H. made her appearance before dinner—a most amiable inanity, fat, fair, and thirty, with innocent flaxen curls, blue ribbons in her cap, and a babyfied, simpering face; the sort of woman whose presence at a dinner-table, or in a drawing-room, one can only remember by perpetual mental effort. Happily she did not demand much attention, but was content to sit still and simper at her husband's jokes and madame's 'agreeable rattle.'

"We talked of everything and everybody. The divine Carlitz, who in her audience-chamber at the Bonbonnière had received me with such chilling courtesy, was now cordial and

familiar as friendship itself. Our conversation developed innumerable points of sympathy between us: mutual likings, mutual antipathies —all of the most frivolous kind; for the world of Estelle Carlitz was a world of trifles—a universe of cashmere-shawls, pug-dogs, airy ballads, dainty pony-carriages, diamonds, and strawberries and cream. I have since heard that beneath that snowy breast, whereon bright gems seemed to shine with intenser brightness, there beat a heart full of generous pity for her own sex, though hard as adamant for ours.

"To me, upon this particular evening, in this lonely mountain-retreat, she was delightful. The dinner was excellent—simplicity itself, but served with a rustic grace that might have charmed Savarin or Alvanly. In my own eyrie the *cuisine* had been a lamentable failure; and the fact that it was so, may have somewhat contributed to the causes of that ever-increasing weariness of spirit which had been my portion in these mountain regions. At five-and-twenty a man can endure a good deal

in this way. I was no *gourmet*, though I had lived amongst men who, in the old Roman days, would have known by the flavour of their oysters whether they had been brought from the coasts of barbarous Britain—men who discussed the *menu* of a dinner with a solemnity that would have sufficed for the forming of a Cabinet, and arranged the importation of a truffled turkey or a Strasburg pie with as much care as might have attended the dismissal of a secret emissary to the Jacobite court at Rome in the days of the first two Georges.

"H. dozed after dinner, worn out by a long morning's fishing; while Madame Carlitz and I trifled with our modest dessert, and slandered our London acquaintance. Between us we seemed to know every one. The lady's knowledge of the great world was chiefly second-hand, it must be confessed, but she told me many facts relating to my intimate acquaintance that were quite new to me, and which might have made my hair stand on end, had I not happily outlived that period in which the

secret records of our friends' lives have power either to shock or to astonish.

"Nothing could present a more piquant contrast to my poor C.'s plaintive looks and tones, and ill-concealed unhappiness, than the elegant vivacity of this most fascinating Carlitz. And to have found her thus remote from her usual surroundings, sequestered, unexpected, as mountain sylph, lent a positive enchantment to the whole affair.

"We went out on to the lawn in the tender moonlight, while Mrs. H. made tea for us at a pretty lamp-lit table, and that most amiable and inconsiderately-considerate H. slept on serenely in his comfortable chintz-covered easy-chair. We went out into that divine, intoxicating light. The ripple of the waves sounded softly afar. A deep cleft in the mountain revealed a glimpse of moonlit water, and around and about us fell the shadows of the mighty hills.

'It is like a scene in an opera,' cried Madame Carlitz.

"And it was evident the set awakened no higher emotion in her mind.

'If such a set were only manageable at the Bonbonnière! But we have not enough depth for this kind of thing. That is what we want, you see—depth.'

'Yes,' I answered, almost sadly, 'that is what we want—depth.'

'The moonlight effect is only a question of green gauzes, and lamps at the wing. I think, by the bye, we make our moonlights a little too green. I wonder whether Mr. Fresko has ever *seen* the moon. He spends all his evenings in the theatre, smoking and drinking beer in his painting-room, or hanging about the side-scenes, smelling intolerably of stale tobacco. I really doubt if he has ever seen this kind of thing. But I can't afford to change him for a better painter. His interiors are exquisite. He was painting a tapestried drawing-room, after Boucher, when I left London—a scene that will enchant you next season. The draperies are to be blue watered-silk—real silk, you know;

and folding-doors at the back will open into a garden of real exotics, if I can get my florist to supply them; but he is rather an impracticable sort of person, who is always wanting sums on account.'

'And the piece?' I asked.

'Oh, the piece is a pretty-enough little trifle,' the lady replied, with supreme carelessness; '*The Marquis of Yesterday*, a vaudeville of the Pompadour period, adapted from Scribe. Of course I am to play Pompadour.'

"On this I would fain have become more sentimental. The mountain light, the deep mysterious shadows, the glimpse of ocean—all invited to that dreamy sentimentality which is of earth's transient intoxications the most delightful. But Madame Carlitz was not sentimentally inclined. To shine, to astonish, to enchant—these to her were but too easy. The melting mood was out of her line. And though she fooled me by her charming air of sympathy, I felt, even in the hour of my delusion, a vague sense that it was all stage-play, and

that the looks and tones which thrilled my senses, and almost touched that finer sense I had been taught to call my soul, were the same looks and tones which the dramatic critics praised in the finished actress of the Bonbonnière.

"Have I any right to be angry with her if she was all falsehood, when there was so little reality in my own *fade* sentimentality and hackneyed flatteries? No; I am not angry. I encountered the enchantress but a few nights ago in society, and said to myself, wonderingly, 'Once I almost loved you.'

"H. awoke, and smiled upon us with his genial smile, as we returned to the pretty lamplit room.

'Have you two children been rehearsing the balcony-scene in the moonlight,' he cried. And then we went back to our London talk and London scandal, and H. told us some admirable stories, more or less embellished by a glowing imagination; and Mrs. H. simpered,

placidly, just as she had simpered at dinner; and madame contradicted her friend, and laughed at him, and interrupted him by delicious mimicry of his *dramatis personæ*, and behaved altogether in a most fascinating manner.

"I went home slowly in the moonlight, meditating on my evening's entertainment.

'Have I been happy?' I asked myself. 'No. I have been only amused; and I have come to that period in which little beyond amusement is possible for me.'

"And all my dreams had resolved themselves into this! My Cynthia was not to be found on earth; and the next best thing to the spirit that walks as free as air the clouds among, was—an elegant and fashionable actress.

"My evening had been very pleasant to me; and I was angry with myself, disappointed with myself, because it had been so.

"I thought of Byron. It was not till his star was waning that he found that one com-

panion-spirit who was to console him for the brilliant miseries of his career.

'Numa was an old man when he met his Ægeria,' I said, to myself. 'Perhaps for me too the divine nymph will appear in life's dreary twilight.'

"I found that my poor C. had been sorely distressed, and even alarmed, by my unwonted absence; and I had no choice but to burden my conscience with a falsehood, or to make her unhappy by the confession that I had been beguiled into the forgetfulness of time in the society of a more fascinating person than her poor, pretty, sentimental self.

'I found my friend T. at his hut beyond D—— H——,' I said; 'and the fellow insisted on my dining with him.'

"My simple-minded C. had implicit faith in my word, even after that *one* broken promise which had caused this poor child so many tears.

'I am so glad you found an old friend,' she said; 'but oh, H., I cannot tell you what I

have suffered in all these long hours! There is no terrible accident which I have not pictured to myself. I thought how you might lose your footing in the narrow path at the edge of the cliff; I thought you might have been tempted to go round by the sands, and that the tide had risen before you could reach the steps in the cliff. I sent D. to look for you."

"I told her that on another occasion she must disturb herself with no such fear, and hinted that as E. T. was a very intimate and affectionate friend, I might find myself compelled to dine with him occasionally during his stay.

'Will he be here long?' she asked, piteously.

'Oh dear, no,' I replied; 'depend upon it, he will soon be tired of these desolate regions.'

"I had pointed out the cottage to her in one of our walks, and had given her some slight account of the owner.

"After this I was often away from my too sad, too gentle companion. Carlitz seemed to

me every day more delightful. I forgot all that I had been told about this most volatile of human butterflies, this most enchanting of the papilionaceous tribe. I, the *blasé* worldling, suffered myself to be caught in that airy net. Most completely was I deluded by her smile of welcome; the sweet, low voice, that grew lower and sweeter when she talked with me; the tender tones in which the enchantress confessed her love for these wild, romantic regions; the unexpected happiness she had found amongst these rugged hills; the disinclination —nay, indeed, the positive disgust—with which she contemplated her approaching return to London; all the meretricious charms of the accomplished coquette had given place to the tender grace, the almost divine loveliness of the woman who for the first time discovers that she possesses a heart, and who only becomes aware of that possession in the hour in which she loses it for ever.

"It must not be supposed that I yielded to this new influence without some weak struggle.

Every night I went back to my eyrie, determined to see the divine Carlitz no more. Every morning I found C.'s society more hopelessly dull, and was fain to take refuge in a mountain ramble. Unhappily, the ramble always ended at the same spot.

"To me had been offered some of the sweetest flatteries ever shaped by woman's lips; but the lovely proprietress of the Bonbonnière was past-mistress of the art, and her flatteries were more subtle than sweetest words. She fooled me to the top of my bent. C. was day by day more neglected; my books were abandoned; my ambitions, my aspirations, for the time utterly forgotten. I had found the supreme good of the Sybarite's life—amusement. And my vanity was flattered by the idea that I was beloved by a woman whose name was synonymous with the verb 'to charm.'

"Yes; I was beloved. How else could I account for that gradual transformation which had changed the most volatile of women into a creature pensive and poetical as Sappho or

Heloise? If there had been any striking suddenness in this change, I might have considered it a mere stage-trick; but the transition had been so gradual, and seemed so unconscious. What motive could she have for deceiving me? Had she been free to marry, she might have considered me an eligible *parti*, and this might have been a matrimonial snare; but I had been given to understand that somewhere, undistinguished and uncared for, there existed a person answering to the name of Carlitz, and possessing legal authority over this lovely lady. From matrimonial designs I was therefore safe; and I told myself that these signs and tokens which I beheld with such rapture were the evidence of a disinterested affection.

"I remembered the lady's elegant insolence in the green-room of the Bonbonnière; and it pleased me to think that I had humbled so proud a spirit.

"Whether the sentiment which this most fascinating woman inspired in my mind was

ever more than gratified vanity, I know not. For the moment it seemed a deeper feeling; and in thought and word I was already inconstant to that poor child whom I had loved so fondly, so purely, so truly, when we walked, hand locked in hand, on that lovely English shore beyond the little town of B——.

"I hated myself for my inconstancy, but was still inconstant. This woman had a thousand arts and witcheries wherewith to beguile me from my better self. Or were not all her witcheries comprised in one profound and simple art?—SHE FLATTERED ME.

"It is needless to dwell long upon this, my second disappointment in affairs of the heart. The net was spread for me; and, unsuspecting as Agamemnon, I allowed this fair Clytemnestra to entangle me in her fatal web before she gave me the *coup de grâce*.

"Every morning I found some fresh excuse for spending my day in her society. We went upon all manner of excursions, with Mr. and Mrs. H. to play propriety. Any fragment of

Gothic tower or ruined stone wall within twenty miles of E. T.'s small domain served as a pretext for a long drive and an impromptu picnic. We went fishing in a rough yacht, and brought up monsters in the way of star-fish and dog-fish, sword-fish and jelly-fish, from the briny deep; but rarely succeeded in securing any piscatorial prize of an edible nature.

'I don't exactly know what kind of thing we are fishing for,' H. said, piteously, ; 'but if the boat is to be filled with these savage reptiles, I should be obliged if you would allow me to be put on shore at the earliest opportunity.'

"In all our rambles, madame's gaiety and good-humour were the chief source of our delight. Her animal spirits were inexhaustible; and for me alone were reserved those occasional touches of sentiment which, in a creature so gay, possessed an unspeakable charm. Her accomplishments were of the highest order, but her reading very little. Yet, by her exquisite

tact and *savoir-faire*, she made even her ignorance bewitching. And then she had the art of seeming so interested in every subject her companion started, and would listen to my prosiest rhapsody with eyes of mute eloquence, and parted lips that seemed tremulous with suppressed emotion.

"One day, after she had been even more than usually vivacious and enchanting, during a little open-air repast among the most uninteresting ruins in A——, I was surprised, and indeed mystified, by a sudden change in her manner.

"We had wandered away from the ruins, leaving H. and his placid wife calmly discussing a bottle of E. T.'s old Madeira. Slowly and silently we walked along a solitary path, winding through the bosom of a most romantic glen. I was silent, in sympathy with my companion's unwonted thoughtfulness. Of my own feelings I had spoken to Estelle Carlitz in the vaguest terms. Close and constant as our companionship had been within these few

weeks, we had never passed beyond the boundary-line of flirtation. Poetical and sentimental we had been, in all conscience; but our poetry and sentiment had been expressed by eloquent generalities, which had committed neither of us. Yet I could not doubt that the lady numbered me among her slaves; and I dared to believe my bondage was not to be an utterly hopeless captivity.

'Can you imagine anything more beautiful than this secluded glen?' said Madame Carlitz, suddenly. 'One can scarcely fancy it a part of the same world which contains that noisy whirlpool, London. I cannot tell you how this place has made me hate London. I wish E. T. had never offered me his house. What good have I done myself by coming here? I shall only feel the contrast between perfect peace and unceasing care more keenly when I go back to all my old troubles. It would have been wiser to stay in town, and go on acting, until I realized the dismal prophecies of my medical advisers. If I am doomed to die in harness, my life might

as well end one year as another. What does it matter?'

"The words were commonplace enough of themselves, but from the lips of Carlitz the commonest words were magical as the strains of Arion to kindly Dolphin—musical as the seven-stringed lyre with whose chords Terpander healed the wounds of civil war.

'Do you really mean that you have been happy here among these rugged mountains and barren valleys—you?'

'Me—I, who speak to you. Happy! Ah, but too happy!' murmured the divine Estelle, in tones of profoundest melancholy. 'My life here has been like a pleasant dream; but it is over, and to-morrow I must set my face towards London.'

'To-morrow!' I exclaimed. 'Surely this is very sudden.'

'It is sudden!' answered madame, with a short, impatient sigh; 'but it is inevitable, as it seems. H. received letters this morning; all sorts of bills and lawyers' threats—horrors

which I am incapable of comprehending. I must return; I must, if I die on the journey, *quand même*,' she cried, becoming less English as she became more energetic. 'They will have it, these harpies. I must open my theatre and begin my season, and have the air to gain money *à flots*. Then they will tranquillize themselves. H. will talk to them. This must be. Otherwise they will send their myrmidons here, and put me into their Clichy—their Bench.'

"I expressed my sympathy with all tenderness; but madame shook her head despairingly, and would not be consoled. I remembered the existence of the unknown Carlitz, and reflected that his accomplished wife could scarcely be subject to the horror of imprisonment for debt while sheltered by the ægis of her coverture. But could I basely remind her of his obscure and obnoxious existence? Sentiment, chivalry, devotion, forbade so business-like a suggestion.

'My dear Estelle,' I murmured, 'remain

in these tranquil regions till you grow weary of nature's solitude and my society. You need have no fear of your creditors while I have power to write a cheque.'

"I pressed the daintily-gloved hand that rested on my arm. It was the first time I had uttered her Christian name. Until this moment I had worshipped on my knees. But the tender down is brushed from the wings of Cupid when he rubs shoulders with Plutus.

"The divine Carlitz drew her hand from mine with a movement of outraged dignity.

'Do you think so meanly of me as *that?*' she asked, proudly. 'Do you think I would borrow money from *you?*'

"The emphasis on the last word of the first sentence revealed the nobility of the speaker's mind; the emphasis on the last word of the second sentence went straight home to the—vanity—of the hearer.

'Estelle!' I exclaimed, 'you cannot refuse the poor service of my fortune! Can there be any question of obligation between

you and me? Have you not taught me what it is to be happy? have you not——'

"Idem, idem, idem! Why should I transcribe the milk-and-watery version of that old story, which is only worth telling when it is written in the heart's blood of an honest man?

"Deep or earnest feeling I had none. By nature I was inconstant. The love that had glorified the sands of B—— with a light that shone not from sun or moon, had faded from my life. Like a fair child who dies in early infancy, the god had vanished, and the memory of his sweet companionship alone remained to me. I think I had tried to fall in love with Estelle Carlitz, and had failed. But I was none the less anxious to win her regard. There is a fashion in these follies; and to have been beloved by the fair directress of the Bonbonnière would have given me *kudos* amongst my acquaintance of the clubs—nay, even in patrician drawing-rooms, to which the lovely Carlitz herself was yet a stranger.

"This was in my mind as I declared myself in a hackneyed strain of eloquence.

"The lady heard me to the end in silence, and then turned upon me with superb indignation.

'*Taisez-vous*. Would you offer to lend me money if I were in your own set—if I were not an actress, a person whom you pay to amuse your idle evenings? It is not so long since they refused us Christian burial in my country. Ah! but you are only like the rest. You talk to me of your heart and your banker's-book in the same breath!' she cried, passionately. 'It is mean of you to persecute me with offers of help which you ought to know that I cannot, and will not, accept. But you are in your right. It was I who betrayed my poverty. You wrung my secret from me. I beg you to speak of it no more. My affairs are in very good hands. Mr. H. will arrange everything for me; and—I shall go to-morrow. And now let us be friends. Forget that I have ever spoken to you about these things, and forget that I have been angry.'

"She turned to me with her most bewitching smile, and held out her hand. This power of transition was her greatest charm. The gift that made her most accomplished among stage-players made her also most delightful among women. Pity that the woman who is playing a part should always have so supreme an advantage over the woman who is in earnest.

"We spoke no more of money-matters. I assured Madame Carlitz that, in the circle which she was pleased to call my 'set,' there was no one who possessed my respect in greater measure than it was possessed by herself. And at this juncture we heard the jovial voice of the genial H. echoing down the glen, announcing that the carriage was ready for our return.

'It is agreed that we are to forget everything,' said madame, 'except that this is to be my last evening in this dear place, and that we are to spend it together.'

"To this I consented with all tender reverence and submission. Our homeward drive was gaiety itself—our dinner, the banquet of a

Horace and Lydia after that little misunderstanding about Chloe and the Thurine boy had been settled to the satisfaction of both parties. After dinner Estelle sang to me, accompanying herself on the guitar, which she played with a rare perfection. The old, forgotten ballads come back to me sometimes, and I hear the low sweet voice, and the sound of the waves washing that rocky headland in A——.

"After she had sung as many songs as I could in conscience entreat from her, I asked H. to smoke a cigar with me in the garden. He came promptly at my call; and I know now, though I was persistently blind at the moment, that a little look of intelligence passed between him and my enchantress as he crossed the room to comply with my request.

"We went out upon the lawn, lighted our cigars, and paced up and down for some few minutes in silence. Then I plunged into the middle of things.

'H.,' I said, 'how much would it take to clear Madame Carlitz of her pressing pecuniary

engagements, and release her from any necessity of commencing a new season at the Bonbonnière for the next few months?'

"H. gave a long whistle.

'My dear boy, don't think of it,' he exclaimed; 'it can't be done. We must open the theatre, make what money we can; and if we can't make a composition, we had better go through the court.'

'But Carlitz!' I remonstrated.

'Carlitz is dying,' replied H., with supreme carelessness—'has been dying for the last four years. It's very trying for her. She'd have been driving in her barouche, with strawberry-leaves on the panel, by this time, if he hadn't been so long about it. But a man can't go on dying for ever, you know; there must be a limit to that sort of thing.'

'You talk of a composition. Would a cheque for a thousand pounds enable her to satisfy her creditors?'

"Mr. H. deliberated.

'Fifteen hundred might do,' he said, pre-

sently; "Snoggs and Bangham, the builders, must have a decent lump of money to stop *their* mouths; and there's Kaliks, the florist, an uncommonly tough customer. Yes, I think something between fifteen hundred and two thousand would do it.'

'You must contrive to settle matters for fifteen hundred,' I said. 'I know what a clever financier you are, H. Take me to your room, and give me a pen and ink. I have been sending away money this morning, and happen to have my cheque-book in my pocket.'

'My dear fellow, this generosity is really something utterly unprecedented, and completely overpowering,' exclaimed H., in a fat, choking voice. 'But I doubt if madame will be induced to accept a loan of this nature. If she does avail herself of your generous offer, the matter must of course be placed on a strictly business-like footing. If a bill of sale on the wardrobe and musical library of the Bonbonnière would satisfy your legal adviser as security——'

"I assured Mr. H. that nothing could be far-

ther from my thoughts than the desire to secure myself from loss by means of a bill of sale.

'The very name of such an instrument sets my teeth on edge,' I said; 'the money will be to all intents and purposes a free gift, but it may be better to call it a loan.'

'My dear fellow,' cried H., with a gulp, expressive of generous emotion, 'this is noble. But you don't know madame. Proud, sir, proud as Lucifer.'

"I remembered that little scene in the glen, and could not dispute the fact of the lady's haughty and somewhat impracticable mind.

'It can't be done, sir,' said H., decisively; 'it's a pity, but it can't be done.'

'Why not? Madame Carlitz knows nothing of business matters. I have heard her say as much fifty times.'

'A mere child, sir—a baby.'

'In that case there is no difficulty. I will write the cheque; you will settle with the tradesmen, and tell Madame Carlitz nothing except that those obnoxious persons are satis-

fied. You may take as much credit as you please for your financial powers; I shall not betray the secret of the affair.'

'Upon my word, my dear friend, you are a prince!' said H., with enthusiasm.

"Nor did he make any further difficulty. We finished our cigars, and went into the house together, with stealthy footsteps; for the thing we were about to do was a kind of treason. H. led me into a little room which he called his den—a room in which he had spent many weary hours trying to square the circle of madame's pecuniary embarrassments.

"I wrote a cheque for 1,500*l.*, payable to the order of the divine Carlitz.

'She will endorse it without looking at it, I suppose?' I said.

'My dear sir, she would endorse the bond of a compact with Mephistopheles. In business matters she is perfectly infantine. I think she has a vague notion that her creditors can send her to the Tower, and have her head cut off, if she fails to satisfy their demands.'

"On this we went back to the drawing-room, where madame asked me, with a pretty, half-offended air, why I had been so long absent. Then H. brewed some Maraschino punch, which was supposed to be an Olympian beverage, and madame was more charming than ever. If I had been capable of thinking twice of a sum of money squandered on a pretty woman—which I was not—I should have been amply rewarded for my generosity. But I could afford to waste a thousand or two on the caprice of the moment without fear of remorseful twinges or economical regrets after the deed was done.

"It was late when I left the Lodge. Madame and H. followed me to the gate, and bade me good-night under the soft summer stars. Her gaiety had left her by one of those sudden changes that made her charming; and she looked and spoke with a tender sadness as we parted.

'If I could believe in her depth of feeling, if I could hope——' I said to myself, after

that pensive parting; and then I remembered the sands at B——, and the vows that I had vowed, and the dreams that I had dreamed.

'No,' I said, 'if I could trust her, I could not trust myself. With passion and reality I have finished. Let amusement be the business of my life. I will love as Horace loved, and my motto shall be, *Vogue la galère*.'

"I had only walked a few yards away from the gate when I remembered that I had left my light overcoat, with a pocket full of letters and papers, in the hall. I ran back; the gate was open, the door open too. I went in, and took my coat from its peg. As I did so, I was surprised to hear a silvery peal of laughter—long and joyous, nay indeed, triumphant, from my enchantress. H.'s bass guffaw sustained the sweet soprano peal; and even placid Mrs. H. assisted with a cheerful second.

"And but three minutes before Estelle had looked at me with eyes so tenderly mournful, had spoken with tones so sadly sweet!

"I lifted the *portière* and looked into the room.

'I have come back for my coat,' I said.

"The laughter ceased with suspicious abruptness.

'Oh, do come in! This absurd H. has been telling us the most ridiculous story about Fred M. Of course you know Fred M.?' cried madame, in nowise disconcerted.

"She insisted that I should stay to hear the anecdote, which H. told for my benefit, with sufficient fluency, and a dash of that club-house mimicry which passes current for faithful imitation. I did not find the anecdote overpoweringly funny; but the lady sounded her peal of silver bells again, long and loudly as before, and I was fain to believe that this frivolous semi-scandalous relation had been the cause of the laughter that had startled me.

"I was not altogether convinced; and that nice appreciation of club-house anecdotes did not appear to me an excellent thing in woman. My adieux were brief and cold, and I walked homeward somewhat *désillusionné*.

END OF VOL. II.

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